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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Moost of Synne and Harlotries:
The Pattern of the Ideal in The Canterbury Tales

BY

© Karin Edie Capri Fuog

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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OF MASTER OF ARTS

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EDMONTON, ALBERTA
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Moost of Synne and Harlotries: The Pattern of the Ideal in The Canterbury Tales submitted by Karin Edie Capri Fuog in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

R. L. McMaster
(supervisor)

L. N. McKill

Date: June 27, 1988

For Eric, without whom my work would be but chaff.

Abstract

Although religious doctrine provides a rigid code of behaviour, the pilgrims and characters of The Canterbury Tales do not always behave acording to this ideal, especially when they behave sexually. Through his use of parody, and by anticipating certain stereotyped responses from his readers, Chaucer contrasts ideal and actual sexual behaviour in such a way that the ideal becomes a standard against which the actual is measured. The Miller, the Wife of Bath, and the Merchant tell tales which lend themselves to both patristic and worldly readings. By parodying religious music in the Miller's Tale, Chaucer invites a patristic reading to condemn the characters while demonstrating that divine grace embraces even sinners. In this tale the ideal and the human interpenetrate. The Wife of Bath employs religious emblems to defend her imperfect behaviour; however, both her own tone and Chaucer's manipulation of the emblems surrounding her encourage the reader to question her behaviour while aplauding her spirit. The Wife perceives the ideal as something separate from and inapplicable to her own life. The Merchant's Tale invokes the ideal only to condemn human faults. In telling his tale the Merchant adopts a bitter tone which demands his characters be condemned. The progression in these three reflects a pattern of narrowing vision. As all that the characters undertake becomes tainted with sin, the range of possible human actions becomes ever more circumscribed. Not limited to the above three pilgrims, the pattern pervades the whole of The Canterbury Tales. Only at the end of The Canterbury Tales does Chaucer spiral the pattern back to its widest vision. The Parson's Tale demonstrates how man's sins may be forgiven, how man may be accepted despite his flaws. Although the Retractions continue the spiral of acceptance of human flaws, they remain ambiguous. Does Chaucer wish his readers to reject those works which lead to repentance, or does he wish his readers to accept his works and learn from them?

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I. Introduction: Quilting the Pattern

The tension between the human and the ideal, the struggle to live according to divine standards in a less than divine world, is a major theme throughout The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer portrays this tension over and over again, exploring how people actually live and contrasting this actual with the ideal for which they strive. Sex is a major motif in the tales, and one that is useful for exploring the tension between the human and the ideal. In Chaucer's time it was believed that sexual behaviour could send one to heaven or to hell. People knew they should be governed by church doctrine, by an ideal, but actually performed sex in an earthly, human, and imperfect manner. In order to demonstrate both the ideal and the human approach to sex, Chaucer employs parody and plays with the potential responses of his audience. Both parody and reader response theory demand that a text be read on at least two levels simultaneously; Chaucer understands and exploits this demand. By examining his manipulation of parody and reader response with regard to sex in the Miller's Tale, the Wife of Bath's Tale, and the Merchant's Tale, we can perceive more clearly the tension between the human and the ideal and on which side of the debate Chaucer ultimately places himself.

Linda Hutcheon describes the relationship between the first, parodied text, and the second text, which is the parody:

> Parody, therefore, is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text. . . . Parody is, in another formulation, repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity.[1]

Hutcheon is discussing twentieth-century parody, where one text makes reference to another through parody. As she points out, neither the original text nor the parody itself need be denigrated; however, comparison and judgement are an essential part of parody. Once a reader notices the differences between the original and the parody he will be tempted to draw comparisons. The nature of the differences and the tone in which they are related will determine whether the parody or the original is being judged.

I intend to examine Chaucer's parodies of scriptural and courtly emblems in order to discover what judgements, if any, Chaucer wishes his audience to make. Chaucer uses parody to compare the ideal and the actual, the ideal then being the first text, the parodied text; the actual being the second text, the parody. Parody implies a comparison between the actual and the ideal. Chaucer portrays the actual and clearly shows its flaws and limitations; however, within the actual Chaucer invokes the ideal, drawing upon a religious emblem the reader should recognize. Parody does not necessitate satire: parody does not so much ridicule the actual as provide an honest recognition of its flaws and a recognition of the idea, the ideal, from which the actuality sprang or to which it aspires. It is this use of parody which I shall be elucidating.

Although Hutcheon discusses only modern fiction and explicitly states that she does not intend her theory of parody to be applied to any other era,[2] to apply such a theory to Chaucer is not completely unprecedented. Edmund Reiss has also suggested that Chaucer uses parody as an implicit comparison:

> In parody . . . the given exists . . . as something inadequate, we go from it and call up an ideal that exists, as it were, behind it. This ideal is not contained or fully reflected in the given, as in satire. Rather, when we call up the ideal, we are aware of the gap between it and the given. We see just how inadequate the given is, and in this awareness lies the creation of humor. But parody does not, like satire, just make fun of the given: it insists that we see it in terms of something that is adequate. In having us call up this corrective, this ideal, the given necessarily brings into being an additional frame of reference.[3]

Parody implies humour and invites comparison but does not automatically demand mockery or condemnation.

Parody, then, must necessarily have two layers: the actual, with all its flaws and inadequacies, and the ideal, the whole which exists behind the actual and from which the actual was drawn. Chaucer's ideal, his first text, consists of religious emblems from his time: biblical allusions and imagery, single words with religious connotations, allusions and imagery from medieval stories about saints and biblical characters. By interweaving these emblems with characters from The Canterbury Tales Chaucer is providing a potential source for judging the characters; they may be enhanced, denigrated, or merely made funny. Perhaps Hutcheon provides the best criteria for recognizing parody:

> The ideological status of parody is paradoxical, for parody presupposes both authority and its transgression, or, as we have just seen, *repetition and difference*.[4] (my emphasis)

That Chaucer employed parody for its layered effect cannot be doubted. And for Chaucer the ideal and the actual were epitomized in the attitudes towards sex of his revered church, and his beloved human world.

Parody is not only a device for facilitating comparison and judgement, it is also funny. As well as manipulating the comedy of discrepancy between the ideal and the actual, Chaucer plays upon the humour inherent in that particular ideal which he has chosen. Both parody and medieval humour are based on reference. In the medieval world, all things may be compared to Chaucer's chosen ideal: God's creation. Necessarily, all things fall short of this standard and again there is humour in this discrepancy.[5] Not only Chaucer's choice of ideal standard, but also of actual with which to compare it creates humour. Chaucer is comparing human behaviour with a religious ideal. Everyone in his audience is capable of the same sins and by describing human behaviour Chaucer provides the humour of identification.[6] There are, however, various types of humour in the Canterbury Tales. By changing his tone, Chaucer is able to enhance or mitigate the comedy of parody so that the humour may be joyous, black, or anything in between.

Chaucer's ideal standard of sexual behaviour was provided by the church. In Chaucer's day the church dictated the ideals of behaviour for most facets of life, including sexual relationships. The church accumulated rules from one thousand years, rules of moral, Christian conduct: doctrine. Doctrine not only defines the best, how one should best conduct oneself, but also allows for the fallible and imperfect and seeks remedies for sinners. Doctrine, developing as it does over many years, places, and situations, does not remain static, but is constantly in flux, growing, changing, and contradicting itself. Although as a result of this growth differences of opinion existed in Chaucer's time, for convenience I will treat doctrine in Chaucer's time as if it were a consistent set of rules, and

I will outline below those rules which are important for this discussion of The Canterbury Tales.

Doctrine developed from the writings of various church fathers.[7] Each church father was reacting to the problems of his own particular time and personality, and the writing of each was modified by those who came after him. The two major church figures upon whose writings I will base my account of sexual doctrine are St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas took the authority for many of his ideas from Augustine, and Aquinas, by Chaucer's time, was the accepted spokesman for theological teaching, especially teaching on marriage.[8]

According to doctrine, there were three acceptable states of sexual existence: virginity, widowhood, and marriage. These are the ideals. Medieval church authorities agree that virginity is the best state of sexual being. Consecrated to God rather than to the things of this world, a virgin must be so willingly or the virtue is negated;[9] her virginity must be spiritual as well as physical. Virginity is recommended for both men and women. Widowhood is the secondbest state of sexual being.[10] Although it is not as perfect as virginity, for physical perfection has been lost, widowhood can have the same beneficial dedication to God.[11] Of the acceptable states of sexual being, marriage is the least perfect. However, this is not to say that the married are not among the blessed; Augustine vociferously condemns the Manichean heresy which would place the married among the damned.[12] Marriage is the state which Chaucer most commonly depicts.

Sex within marriage is the only morally acceptable form of sexual activity, yet even within marriage there are limitations placed on the reasons for which a couple may indulge in sexual intercourse. Sex is always accompanied by the sin of concupiscence; the three goods of marriage mitigate this sin and thus designate those situations where sex is allowed. Augustine details the three goods of marriage as children, faithfulness, and the sacramental nature of marriage.[13] Thus sex in marriage can always be undertaken if the aim is to conceive children, and it is allowed to prevent one's spouse from lusting after another and straying outside of marriage. This yielding to a spouse's desire is designated rendering the marriage debt. Aquinas sums up the rationale: sex is allowed in marriage in order to prevent sexual sin outside of marriage.[14]

Augustine believes that concupiscence accompanies any sex act and is mitigated only by one of the goods of marriage.[15] Concupiscence is the unreasonable desire of anything, not necessarily sex.[16] Lustful sex is not necessarily mitigated by a good of marriage, and thus the medieval theologians debated whether or not lustful sex was venially or mortally sinful. Whether lustful sex within marriage is mortally or only venially sinful is irrelevant to my discussion; what is important is that sex, even within the bounds of matrimony, can be labelled sinful.

That sexual activity outside of marriage is mortally sinful was unchallenged in Chaucer's time. There are two possible types of sexual activity outside of marriage: adultery and fornication. Adultery, as Aquinas defines it, is entering a bed not one's own,[17] sexual intercourse wherein one of the partners is married to someone else. Fornication is sexual intercourse wherein neither of the partners is married.[18] I will use these terms with this degree of specificity throughout the discussion. Sex within marriage will be called marital intercourse. Unlike adultery and fornication, this term carries no moral judgement; whether marital intercourse is lawful or sinful must be determined from the context within which Chaucer depicts it.

The standards set by the church, the standards of doctrine, are disseminated through The Canterbury Tales with Chaucer relying on the audience's knowledge and application of doctrine and by prompting that knowledge whenever necessary.[19] Chaucer often uses biblical allusion or borrows biblical imagery; he makes use of imagery which is not strictly biblical, but which the church has adopted; he alludes to morality plays and even retells some of the saints' legends. Like the direct references to doctrine, these emblems invoke the ideal of the church, assuming, of course, that the audience can recognize the original source and relate the original to the present context. Owst has shown conclusively that such an assumption can be made about Chaucer's audience.[20] Thus any biblical allusion or imagery, no matter how contextually inappropriate, has the potential for parodic intent: the ideal is invoked alongside the actual.[21]

The church presents one ideal standard for sex. However, even within the standards of doctrine, sex is only grudgingly allowed; sex is not recognized as loving or joyful, and it is actively discouraged. Priests giving confession make a practice of looking especially for sexual sin.[22] Chaucer knows that sex in the human world has a different meaning from the one doctrine assigns it; he is well aware of the potential joy and love in sexual activity.

In order to accommodate their more worldly conceptions of sex, Chaucer's contemporaries developed a secular, human standard for sexual activity: the courtly love code.

Courtly love is a formalized code of service, courtship, and love-making whose standards come from literature. It is unknown whether or not courtly love actually was practiced; however, Chaucer applies its emblems and standards to his characters as if these standards have the same validity as church standards. Although it is not an ideal, courtly love provides a second standard. Courtly love was probably not called such by the people who wrote its rules and stories; in fact, even the rules differ for different places.[23] However, it is possible to generalize some of the rules of courtly love. Courtly love is a "perfect" love; it is a love which ennobles the lover and engenders virtue in him.[24] It is a love which must be kept secret, even though it is not necessarily sexual.[25] Courtly love can exist only between a man and a woman who are not married to each other.[26] Finally, courtly love changes the rules of gender dominance. In medieval society, man is dominant: he has a greater legal identity as well as social advantages such as education and inheritance. Church doctrine states that in marriage the husband should rule the family, although he should not overly oppress his wife. In courtly love, on the other hand, the woman has dominance. The man sues for her favour, which she grants or withholds as she pleases. However, once they agree to become lovers, each one strives to please the other and neither commands.[27]

The rules above define courtly love as I will be employing the term;[28] only a few additions should be made. E. T. Donaldson notes that in British romances courtly love tends to end in marriage,[29] and H. A. Kelly points out that this is almost always the case with Chaucer's lovers.[30] Further, a particular ritual of courtship is invariably employed by the hopeful lover: he fears the lady's rejection, but begs her favour anyway; he cannot eat or sleep; he threatens to die if she rejects him. This ritual is the major emblem of courtly love; by playing upon it Chaucer manipulates another source of parody.

Although I shall not be examining Chaucer's courtly romances, I shall examine two of the fabliaux, two parodies of courtly love.[31] Like courtly romances, the subject matter of the fabliaux is illicit love; the fabliaux, however, mock the ritual courtship and question the purportedly sexless ideal of courtly love.[32] These same fabliaux also parody church standards. In a single tale Chaucer is thus able to compare his characters to both an ideal and a human standard.

Parody requires an audience capable of thought, of comparing and judging. The audience must recognize the inadequacies of the actual and must superimpose the ideal. Parody requires reader response.[33] No matter how well a work is written, an audience will interpret or pick out the significance of a text according to the audience's own biases.[34] This subjective interpretation is the reader response. The audience need not be real; it can be imaginary, a fictitious being whose responses the author is able to predict and thus cater to, deny, or comment upon. Yet an author can never account for all potential audiences, for the significance of a text will always be based on the responses of a real reader. Wolfgang Iser defines the difference between the meaning and the significance of a text: the meaning is what the author puts in the text; the significance is what the reader gets out.[35] Of course, a good author will incorporate many meanings into his text, and a good reader will discover more than one significance. Interpretation is a cooperative effort between author and reader, and the good author not only recognizes this, but also uses it to his advantage. Significance, then, is not merely subjective; the reader must react intelligently to what is actually in the text, although he reacts within the limitations of his own bias. Like parody, reader response allows for different layers in the text. Different audiences will obtain different significances, and the author may allow for several types of audience and play to them within the text.[36]

The term "reader response theory" is modern rather than medieval, but its principles were obviously known to Chaucer, and we can apply the theory in order to understand better The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer allows for several audiences, two of which he acknowledges directly within the text: the pilgrims and the audience which Chaucer the pilgrim is addressing. In the head- and end-links Chaucer provides the pilgrims' responses as well as Chaucer the pilgrim's address to an audience not incorporated into The Canterbury Tales: those who will read the tales he is transcribing. There are more audiences for The Canterbury Tales than these two. The teller is another, more complex, audience. First, he is an audience to his own tale; he reacts to it during the telling. Secondly, he may provide an audience by trying to evoke a certain response, as the Clerk does in his condemnation of Walter. Moreover, there is more than one teller for each tale: the pilgrim, Chaucer the pilgrim, and Chaucer are all telling the tale, each with different motives and different audiences.

In his General Prologue, Chaucer explicitly acknowledges his reading audience and points out to them that they must be ready to look for levels in the tales:

> But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
> That ye n'arette it nat my vileynye,
> Thogh that I pleynly speke in this mateere,
> To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
> Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.
> For this ye knowen al so wel as I,
> Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
> He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
> Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
> Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
> Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewe,
> Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.
> He may nat spare, althogh he were his brother;
> He moot as wel seye o word as another.
> Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ,
> And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.
> Eek Plato seith, whoso that kan hym rede,
> The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede,
> Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,
> Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
> Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde.
> My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.
> (I, 725-46)[37]

Chaucer claims he reports the pilgrims' "wordes and hir cheere"; already he is pointing out two levels. Compared with reading only a tale, reading a tale in the context of what we know about its teller enhances and changes the interpretation. Chaucer insists that he must be true to the words of the original teller and begs our forgiveness not for creating, but for transcribing. However, at the end of his apology, Chaucer reminds us that he is, after all, creating. By humbly apologizing for not describing the pilgrims hierarchically, he reminds his audience that he can write whatever he pleases. The audience must, therefore, be ready to look for different levels and willing to interpret.

Chaucer knows that his audience consists of many people, each of whom has many biases and methods of interpretation. I believe that because Chaucer could not anticipate all the reactions of every member of his audience, he chose several stereotypical readers whose responses he could anticipate, encourage, or mitigate. These readers do not exist, yet their responses may be part of the reaction of a real reader. One potential reader is the patristic reader, the person who diligently searches the tale for the moral teaching which medieval artistic theory claims must be there. In fact the patristic reading is one which should be examined whenever a religious emblem is recognized. Chaucer is too good an author to be employing religious allusions without a purpose. Although the characters in the tales use only the empty forms of religion, the reader is constantly made aware of religion because these forms are so often touched upon.[38] Another potential reader is the learned reader, the well-read audience. Such a reader can be assumed to be familiar with both the courtly romances and the fabliaux and to know what to expect from the Miller. A third potential reader is the worldly reader. Although this reader recognizes sin and understands its consequences, he is forgiving, willing to laugh indulgently because he can picture himself in the same situation. For the purposes of my discussion I have assumed that both the patristic and the worldly readers are learned. These two responses will form the basis of my investigation into Chaucer's manipulation of reader response. Of course these are but two responses from among the myriad Chaucer must have received from his court audience.

It is impossible now for us to determine the nature of the court audience. There remains no record of its reaction to Chaucer's work, no certification of its patronage. We do not know whether the court laughed at the same things we do, or whether individuals caught allusions. We do not even know whether it was privileged to hear Chaucer's works more than once. However, we can make some assumptions about the court. No great author writes without knowing that his work is nothing unless it reaches an audience: "Without an audience there is no meaning."[39] Thus we must assume that the court audience for whom _The Canterbury Tales_ was being written must have incorporated readers whose potential response equals those listed above.

Chaucer's audience today consists of all potential audiences: the critics, the scholars, the students, the people who read him. The patristic reader, the learned reader, and the worldly reader are all incorporated in today's modern readers. I shall be detailing two of these responses, and because I am aware of them, and also a reader, I shall no doubt incorporate them into my own individual significance of the text.

Both parody and reader response theory provide some means for uncovering levels in The Canterbury Tales. As these levels are uncovered, they reveal a basic tension between sex and religion. We have partially discussed the fact of this tension in church doctrine. Yet this is not merely a tension between sex and religion; it can be symbolically extended to a larger tension in The Canterbury Tales, the tension between how people should behave and how they do behave, between the ideal world and the human world. The world of the ideal is most strongly informed by doctrine, the human by how people actually interact. By manipulating religious emblems, Chaucer employs parody to reinforce this tension. While a worldly reading of a tale as plot may conflict with a patristic interpretation of the doctrine invoked through parody, that patristic interpretation may conflict with the narrator's tone. Does Chaucer resolve the tension between the ideal and the human in The Canterbury Tales?

The tales I have chosen explore the tension between the human world and the world of the divine: the Miller's Prologue and Tale and the Reeve's Prologue which links to it; the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale and the Friar's Prologue which links to it; and the Merchant's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue. The end-links are necessary, for they depict the pilgrims' responses to the tales just told. Each tale demonstrates an awareness of both the human and the divine, all use parody, but in each case the comparison between the ideal and the actual reveals a different vision.

The different visions of the Miller, the Wife of Bath, and the Merchant reflect a progression which I call a pattern. The vision of human activity portrayed by these three tales is one which narrows. Reacting differently to the problem of human activity dominated by sin, these pilgrims speak in different tones. The Miller gleefully accepts his hero and heroine despite their sins. Although the Wife of Bath vociferously defends what she perceives to be her rights, she remains unconvinced that hers is the best way of life. The Merchant depicts human failings in all their vulgarity and condemns the people who sin. The pattern of these tales grows in such a way that any human action which does not conform with doctrine is rejected. However, the pattern in the whole of the Canterbury Tales is not linear but spiral; at the end of the Canterbury Tales the vision broadens so that man can sin without being eternally condemned.

When read patristically, the Miller's Tale condemns the actions of all the characters involved; the constant religious allusion invokes the doctrine against which they all fall short. Yet the response to the Miller's Tale is one of joy: it is an exuberant tale which celebrates life. In the Miller's Tale the world of the human and the world of the divine are not separate; they overlay one another, interlacing in such a way that the divine not only shows up the inadequacies of the human, but embraces them, allows for them, and makes them into part of a larger whole. Here the vision is at its widest, and the pattern is at its beginning to which it will return only slightly changed.

Of Chaucer's pilgrims, the Wife of Bath is the strongest voice of the human world. She is of the human world; she loves the human world; and still she senses the inadequacy of her vision. The Wife of Bath does not conduct her own life according to the ideal of doctrine, yet she senses that the ideal does exist. To her, the human world is separate from the world of the ideal, and the ideal remains unattainable. The vision is narrowing: the ideal and the human no longer intermingle, and in following the human something is lost.

The Merchant's Tale is perhaps the bitterest tale told on the Canterbury pilgrimage. As teller, the Merchant condemns everyone in the tale: all are blamed, but none are punished. A patristic reading, which the Merchant invites, is even more damning: the characters will be judged by God, and in the divine scale they weigh even lighter than in the human. The Merchant imposes the ideal world upon the human in such a way that the human is shown to be inadequate and the divine is limited to condemning those inadequacies. Here the vision is narrowest and mankind looks irredeemable.

I shall examine the Miller, the Wife of Bath, and the Merchant in that order because it is the order relative to each other that they would occupy even if The Canterbury Tales were complete. Despite the debate concerning the ordering of all the tales, this ordering is unquestionable. The Miller's Tale belongs to the first fragment: all the head- and end-links are intact. Thus it is the first of our three. The Merchant's Tale makes reference to the Wife of Bath, both calling her by name and alluding to statements made in her Prologue. Such reference would be impossible had not the Wife of Bath spoken before the Merchant. Thus the Wife of Bath's is the second tale, and the Merchant's is the last. The pattern revealed by this chronology is one of narrowing vision. The Miller depicts the human and the ideal without conflict; the Wife of Bath depicts them as separate worlds, disjunct and never touching; the Merchant depicts the human and the ideal limiting each other.

However, the pattern does not stop with the Merchant's Tale. The end of the Canterbury Tales returns to the position that man is not necessarily damned. In his tale, the Parson demonstrates how man may gain salvation through repentance. His vision is wider than even the Miller's, for he embraces man despite man's sins, and it is the fullness of doctrine which encourages him to do so. The pattern has returned to its beginning and ascended. The Retractions, then, are a fitting capstone for the whole of The Canterbury Tales. Traced from the Miller through the Wife of Bath to the Merchant, secular art has a linear pattern. Only a devotional work, the Parson's Tale, returns complete vision and moves the pattern into a spiral. Because his secular art has limited him in this way, Chaucer retracts it; the Retractions are his act of contrition. Chaucer chooses wholeness of vision and the divine. But if Chaucer has, in fact, rejected secular art, why does he ask that it be read indulgently; why does he not ask that it not be read at all? The Retractions are a fitting end for the Canterbury Tales; however, they do not finally resolve all the problems and ambiguities of the work.

II. The Miller

Of the three secular tales I will be examining, the Miller's Tale is the most accepting of human failings. However, the message of the tale is not an unadulterated lauding of all human activity. Two opposing responses to the Miller's Tale are the patristic and the worldly. For the patristic reader the tale is a condemnation of those who disobey doctrine. For the worldly reader who sees and values the joy, the tale is a sprightly lark, a joke with a certain rough justice. These two responses are seemingly mutually exclusive; however, they are both valid, and they are reconciled by Chaucer's use of parody. In the Miller's Tale Chaucer parodies stories from the Bible, religious traditions, and divine harmony; he also parodies courtly love. Chaucer sets up a contrast between the world as it would be if it followed doctrine and the world as it actually exists. He does not, however, reject the one in favour of the other. Chaucer uses parody to reconcile the differences and to show that even the sinners are included in God's world: the divine and the human interpenetrate. The patristic response and the worldly response can be simultaneously accommodated in the Miller's Tale.

The patristic reader always searches for a moral interpretation. A patristic audience looks for the biblical and religious parody, knowing that the background of doctrine invokes an ideal. The characters in the tale are measured against that ideal, and when they fall short, they are condemned. A patristic audience must believe that Chaucer has deliberately alluded to religious texts in order to provoke the comparison, and thus Chaucer must desire a judgemental response. I shall be using D. W. Robertson Jr. as my model for the patristic reader, although I shall also draw on other critics for their elucidations of religious parody in the Miller's Tale. Robertson's patristic reading is well argued and supported; however, I believe that it limits the tale more than Chaucer intended. Robertson acknowledges the humour in the Miller's Tale, but claims that this humour in no way lessens Chaucer's intention that the reader condemn the actions of the characters.[1] Robertson's opinion is not universally held: R. K. Root claims that the emphasis in the

Miller's Tale is on the joke rather than the immorality.[2] These two opinions appear irreconcilable; however, by maintaining a light-hearted and exuberant tone throughout the tale, Chaucer manipulates religious parody so that these views can be reconciled.

Chaucer ensures that a joyous response to the Miller's Tale must be accounted for; he illustrates one such response through his pilgrim audience:

> Whan folk hadde laughen at this nyce cas
> Of Absolon and hende Nicholas,
> Diverse folk diversely they seyde,
> But for the moore part they loughe and pleyde.
> Ne at this tale I saugh no man hym greve,
> But it were oonly Osewold the Reve.
> (I, 3855-60)

The pilgrims have enjoyed the tale; they have accepted its fun and mischief. Nor is this response invalid; Chaucer has deliberately written a tale that has a playful tone. Only "Osewold the Reve" does not like the Miller's tale:

> By cause he was of carpenteris craft,
> A litel ire is in his herte ylaft;
> He gan to grucche, and blamed it a lite.
> (I, 3861-63)

The Reeve does not object to the Miller's Tale because it is immoral; he objects because he used to be a carpenter and he suspects that the Miller is mocking him. Again, this response recognizes the laughter the tale evokes rather than the tale's moral implications.

Nor does the Miller expect his audience to be looking for a moral in his tale. Although he apologizes for his tale, he apologizes not for the content but for his own drunkenness:

> "Now herkneth," quod the Millere, "alle and some!
> But first I make a protestacioun
> That I am dronke, I knowe it by my soun;
> And therfore if that I mysspeke or seye,

> Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye.
> For I wol telle a legende and a lyf
> Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf,
> How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe."
> (I, 3136-43)

The Miller apologizes for neither the content of his tale, nor for the crude language: he attributes such misspeaking to the ale. Yet the Miller does not speak crudely; even when he tells of adultery his words are not vulgar. Unlike the vulgar description of sexual intercourse in the Merchant's Tale, Nicholas and Alisoun's love-making is linked to music and described lyrically.

Chaucer the pilgrim also comments on the Miller's tale before it is told, and he does apologize for the immoral content:

> What sholde I moore seyn, but this Millere
> He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,
> But tolde his cherles tale in his manere.
> M'athynketh that I shal reherce it heere.
> And therfore every gentil wight I preye,
> For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye
> Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce
> Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,
> Or elles falsen som of my mateere.
> And therfore, whoso list it nat yheere,
> Turne over the leef and chese another tale;
> For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,
> Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,
> And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.
> Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys.
> The Millere is a cherl, ye knowe wel this;
> So was the Reve eek and othere mo,
> And harlotrie they tolden bothe two.
> Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame;
> And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game.
> (I, 3167-86)

Chaucer the pilgrim acknowledges that the subject matter of the Miller's Tale is immoral, but insists that the tale is meant only for fun: it is "game." As J. Richardson points out, Chaucer is using his pilgrim's voice for irony: the Miller's Tale is more than merely a game, it has a serious message. Chaucer is actually encouraging a patristic reading.[3] When one returns to this apology after reading the tale and remembers the religious emblems, the tale demands to be reread in an earnest patristic manner. If Chaucer's apology ends on an ironic note, could it also be ironic elsewhere? Chaucer the pilgrim says that the Miller "tolde his cherles tale in his manere" (I, 3169), but the tale is, in fact, flawlessly told. As previously pointed out, the style is not vulgar; rather the Miller's Tale is a well-executed work of art, complex and unified; the tale is not told in a churl's manner. The content of the tale is crude; however, this fault is rendered laughable and even appealing by the narrator's tone. In the apology addressed to his readers Chaucer gives two messages: he encourages a patristic reading, and he encourages reading for tone.

Throughout the rest of my discussion I will be referring to both Chaucer and the Miller as the teller of this tale. Both, of course, are the tellers, and they are working simultaneously but on different levels. The Miller is mainly concerned with telling the plot and mocking courtly love. Although he wishes to tell a merry tale, he is probably more interested in content than in style. Chaucer, on the other hand, very carefully controls the style, and it is he who manipulates religious emblems for the purpose of parody. The fiction that the Miller is telling his own tale is well maintained but not flawless. I shall discuss the Miller as teller after we have examined the tale.

The patristic audience recognizes religious parody and views it as a condemnation of the characters who act against doctrine. The Miller's Tale certainly portrays actions demanding condemnation; it is a tale of adultery, a mortal sin, and particular religious emblems, parodied by the actions of the characters in the tale, aid the condemnation. Absolon's name, for instance, is an obvious allusion to the Absalom of the Old Testament. Chaucer does not parody the biblical story with this use of the name; rather he indicates Absolon's character through allusion. In the Middle Ages Absalom had a reputation of effeminacy;[4] this certainly agrees with the description of Absolon in the Miller's Tale. As well, Absalom betrayed his father; the name is not one to inspire trust.

A different emblem involving Absolon plays on his description rather than his name. Chaucer echoes the Song of Songs in the description of Absolon: as R. E. Kaske points out, he provides Absolon with some of the characteristics of the Sponsus.[5] J. Wimsatt also recognizes these echoes, such as Absolon's hair spreading out like the hair of the Sponsus.[6] The Sponsus was allegorized as Christ, and Absolon, as part of the clergy, is supposed to perform the function of Christ.[7] Absolon's ties to the Song of Songs are reinforced when he sings phrases from this poem to Alisoun.[8]

Chaucer's multiple allusions to the Song of Songs exist for parodic effect. The Middle Ages refused to recognize that the Song of Songs was about secular, romantic love. Instead, the Sponsa and the Sponsus were allegorized so that their meanings fit a more divine love. The Sponsus was often allegorized as Christ, and the Sponsa was either the church or the soul. The Sponsus could also be allegorized as the Holy Spirit, and the Sponsa could be the Blessed Virgin.[9] Absolon does not live up to the ideal portrayed by the Sponsus; his is neither a holy nor a virtuous love. He loves Alisoun, or so he tells her, and she is married. Moreover, as part of the clergy, Absolon is sworn to celibacy. Against the ideal of the Sponsus, Absolon is inadequate and a patristic reader may condemn him for his failure. However, several modern critics have adopted a more worldly attitude and view the parody of the Song of Songs as funny rather than damning. Kaske claims that the motif of the Song of Songs provides a moral edge for the tale without diminishing the comedy.[10] Absolon is judged, but not rejected. Parody reconciles the condemnation and the humour in such a way that neither view completely dominates the other.

A second source of parody in the Miller's Tale is the marriage of John and Alisoun: their marriage resembles the marriage of Joseph and Mary. Again, parody provides the potential for a patristic reading. Like Joseph, John is a carpenter:

> Whilom ther was dwellynge at Oxenford
> A riche gnof, that gestes heeld to bord,
> And of his craft he was a carpenter.
> (I, 3187-89)

The medieval morality plays depicted Mary and Joseph as young and old respectively. Joseph, in at least one play, fears he has become a cuckold when his young wife, supposedly a virgin, tells him that she is pregnant.[11] The marriage of John and Alisoun is a marriage between young and old, and because of this John worries that he might be a cuckold:

> This carpenter hadde wedded newe a wyf,
> Which that he lovede moore than his lyf;
> Of eighteteene yeer she was of age.
> Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,
> For she was wylde and yong, and he was old,
> And demed hymself been lik a cokewold.
> (I, 3221-26)

As well, Alisoun is surrounded by allusions to Mary. As the Sponsa in Absolon's version of the Song of Songs she may be allegorized as Mary. Nicholas' songs, if we infer that he is singing them for and about Alisoun, also imply that Alisoun is Mary:

> And *Angelus ad virginem* he song;
> And after that he song the Kynges Noote.
> (I, 3216-17)

Angelus ad virginem is a song about the annunciation, and J. Gellrich has offered sound evidence that the "Kynges Noote" continues the annunciation motif.[12] Theology surrounding the annunciation offers one further connection between Alisoun and Mary. Like the weasel of the medieval bestiaries, Mary was said to have conceived through her ear. Alisoun is also described as a weasel:[13]

> Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
> As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
> (I, 3233-34)

The comparison between the marriage of John and Alisoun and the marriage of Joseph and Mary is parodic: it is repetition with a difference. By resembling the emblem, the marriage of John and Alisoun invokes the ideal, but Alisoun acts against it. As the Blessed Virgin, Mary helped men resist temptation by turning them away from earthly love.[14] Alisoun attracts and encourages secular love; she is an unlikely Mary. The marriage of Joseph and Mary was considered an attainable human ideal.[15] Joseph and Mary were faithful to each other, raised a child, and yet had no sexual relationship. Alisoun and John are a poor second. Presumably they have a sexual relationship, yet they have no children, and Alisoun is unfaithful to her husband. Although John is exempt from the sin of adultery, he is guilty of loving Alisoun too much. According to a patristic reading, Alisoun and John are condemned through the implicit comparison of their marriage with the marriage of Joseph and Mary, a comparison made possible through parody.

Another emblem which provides the first text of parody is the story of Noah's flood. Chaucer uses the flood in a complex parody which condemns the characters from the Miller's Tale by comparing them with the ideal Noah embodies. Noah's obedience to God provides an ideal example of how people should submit to God's law. By claiming it is God's will that they be saved, Nicholas casts John and himself in the roles of Noah and his family. However, Nicholas and John are unlikely virtuous men for whose sake the world will be saved. Nicholas is arrogant, blasphemous, and lecherous; John is ignorant, faithless, and selfish. They do not even aspire to the ideal portrayed by Noah. As well, the love of Alisoun which prompts both Nicholas and John to act becomes petty and trivial when compared with the divine love God displays in the story of Noah's flood.

Nicholas assumes for himself the role of God: he creates the flood by predicting it. Of course, Nicholas knows there will be no second flood; he is using the biblical story as a means for committing adultery. Moreover, Nicholas assumes God's role by claiming that he will save himself, John, and Alisoun from the flood. Only God has this power. Nicholas' arrogance is most unlike Noah's humble obedience.

In order for his plan to work, Nicholas must convince John that John is to be the second Noah:

> "Now John," quod Nicholas, "I wol nat lye;
> I have yfounde in myn astrologye,
> As I have looked in the moone bright,
> That now a Monday next, at quarter nyght,
> Shal falle a reyn, and that so wilde and wood,
> That half so greet was nevere Noes flood.
> . . . .

> Yet I shal saven hire [Alisoun] and thee and me.
> Hastow nat herd hou saved was Noe,
> Whan that oure Lord hadde warned hym biforn
> That al the world with water sholde be lorn?"
> (I, 3513-35)

That John should play the part of Noah is not inappropriate: in the morality plays of Chaucer's time Noah was portrayed as a carpenter and an old man, just as John is in the Miller's Tale.[16] Nicholas, however, has chosen the story of the flood and placed John in the role of Noah for the purposes of his plan rather than for the superficial resemblance between the two men. As both Nicholas and John know, in the morality plays Noah complains because his wife, a shrewish scold, will not board the ark when he asks her to.[17] Nicholas cites Noah's complaints as a reason why John and Alisoun should have separate tubs:

> "Hastou nat herd," quod Nicholas, "also
> The sorwe of Noe with his felawshipe,
> Er that he myghte gete his wyf to shipe?
> Hym hadde be levere, I dar wel undertake
> At thilke tyme, than alle his wetheres blake
> That she hadde had a ship hirself allone."
> (I, 3538-43)

John will not know if Alisoun leaves her tub.

Noah's flood was often cited as an instance of God's love.[18] Instead of killing all mankind because of their sins, God saved some. God also promised never to drown the world again. This instance of divine love is opposed to Nicholas' reason for invoking Noah's flood: his lust for Alisoun. John believes in the flood and his first thought is to save Alisoun; however, this care is only superficially selfless. Alisoun is the object of John's comfort and lust; she is important only because she is the best thing John owns.[19] To the patristic reader, the contrast between God's caritas and John's and Nicholas' cupiditas is clear, and once again the characters suffer by comparison.

Nicholas easily convinces John that there is to be a second flood, and John's credulity helps to condemn him. Assuming God's authority, Nicholas decrees that John may save Alisoun as well as himself. John's eagerness to do so is not based on obedience to God, it is based either on ignorance or on a lack of faith. After Noah's flood God set His bow in the clouds as a promise that He would never again destroy the world through flooding. John has forgotten this promise, or, remembering it, does not trust God to keep it. Because the audience knows what John should know, the patristic reader condemns John for his reenactment of the flood.

The characters of the Miller's Tale are not only condemned because they fall short of the ideal represented by the story of Noah's flood, they are also punished, presumably for their failings. Noah's flood effected a cleansing of the earth; this flood effects a minor cleansing. The sinners in the Miller's Tale are punished by a lack of water rather than an abundance of it.[20] Absolon would like water to wash his lips; Nicholas would like water to cool his brand; John would like water to break his fall. When Nicholas invokes Noah's flood he invokes a comparison between Noah and those who will be saved from this flood--John, Alisoun, and himself. Alisoun alone remains unpunished, despite her blasphemous participation in reenacting the flood. In her stead is punished Absolon, who is not even aware of Nicholas' plan. This discrepancy of justice cannot be accounted for by the patristic reading we have been following; it will be discussed later.

The parody of Noah's flood is the most damning parody in the Miller's Tale. It is invoked by a character for his own selfish reasons: Nicholas is using scripture to deceive. Even Absolon, in singing the Song of Songs, is not being so blasphemous; Absolon does not mean to deceive, but rather is borrowing words because of their beauty as poetry. The prediction of another flood demonstrates John's ignorance with regard to scripture; he is mocked and condemned for believing what is contrary to God's word. Thus Chaucer's parody of the flood in the Miller's Tale has a stronger cutting edge of sarcasm against the characters than any of the other religious emblems; it best fits a patristic reading.

Another potential source for a patristic reading of the Miller's Tale is the musical allusions. All the music in the Miller's Tale has religious overtones and thus invokes doctrine. Earlier we saw how Alisoun became a parody of the Virgin Mary through Nicholas' singing of the Annunciation. Absolon, too, sings a song whose allusions imply parody. Absolon sings the Song of Songs to Alisoun;[21] he becomes the Sponsus and she the Sponsa:

"What do ye, hony-comb, sweete Alisoun,
My faire bryd, my sweete cynamome?
Awaketh, lemman myn, and speketh to me!
Wel litel thynken ye upon my wo,
That for youre love I swete ther I go.
No wonder is thogh that I swelte and swete;
I moorne as dooth a lamb after the tete.
Ywis, lemman, I have swich love-longynge,
That lik a turtel trewe is my moornynge.
I may nat ete na moore than a mayde."
(I, 3698-3707)

Alisoun is also linked with the Sponsa through her description. Wimsatt points out that the Sponsa has the same apple-sweet breath as Alisoun:[22]

Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,
Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.
(I, 3261-62)

The ideal of the Sponsa, of Mary, is invoked by the Song of Songs and compared to the actual, to Alisoun. The parody of the Song of Songs contrasts caritas with Absolon's love of self and with Alisoun's carnal indulgence.[23] In a patristic reading Alisoun and Absolon must be judged as inadequate. Yet as Wimsatt points out, there is humour in comparing the Sponsus with an idolatrous lover and the Sponsa with an adulterous wife,[24] and the beauty of the language remains undiminished.

Nicholas' psaltery is another example of a musical reference which invokes a doctrinal ideal. The psaltery is a musical instrument with religious associations; it was the instrument on which David composed the psalms. The Middle Ages also considered the psaltery a symbol for Christ on the cross: the strings were stretched over the wood as Christ was stretched on the cross. Thus the psaltery is an emblem of Christ's self-denial and love.[25] The reference to this instrument is parodic, for Nicholas exercises no self-denial, and he sings to gain a different type of love than Christ's.[26] At one point in the tale it even becomes possible to read the psaltery as Nicholas' penis, which he plays until he can play with Alisoun:

> He kiste hire sweete and taketh his sawtrie,
> And pleyeth faste, and maketh melodie.
> (I, 3305-6)

Another reading of these same lines is that Nicholas is playing Alisoun rather than his psaltery. Both interpretations demonstrate a sexual rather than a religious potential.

Another example of religious music which may be read patristically as condemning the characters is the singing of lauds and the ringing of bells when Alisoun and Nicholas commit adultery:

> Ther was the revel and the melodye;
> And thus lith Alison and Nicholas,
> In bisynesse of myrthe and of solas,
> Til that the belle of laudes gan to rynge,
> And freres in the chauncel gonne synge.
> (I, 3652-56)

A comparison between the lovers and the monks is implicit in these lines. The monks are obeying God's rules; they are living celibate as the ideal dictates and praising God with their lives. Alisoun and Nicholas are breaking God's rules by committing adultery. Again a patristic reading condemns the characters in the tale because of the use of religious allusion.

However, perhaps there is another way of reading the religious allusion, a reading which agrees with the joyous response the pilgrims, and modern critics, have had towards the Miller's Tale. To laud something is to praise it; lauds are songs of praise to God. Nicholas and Alisoun, with their love-making, are praising God.[27] Through their love-making, Nicholas and Alisoun find *solas*. *Solas* is a word which cannot be used without a recognition of its religious overtones. *Solas* is a special kind of solace granted by God; it has healing powers for those in trouble. Although the Oxford English Dictionary does not define the word in this way, its use throughout medieval poetry suggests this connotation.[28] A patristic reader could argue that the word only serves to condemn further the lovers, for they are seeking *solas* in a blasphemous manner. However, I wish for a moment to leave the patristic reader, and to venture onto a different level of interpretation. What is the Miller's point in telling the tale, and what is Chaucer's? I wish to look at the surface of the tale, to examine the tone, and to try to determine what kind of an audience each teller is addressing.

Reader response can be generated deliberately by the narrator, and to some extent we are told what to expect from the Miller's tale. Chaucer the pilgrim warns that the Miller tells a tale of harlotry, but he also tells us that the tale is for fun. We have been assured by Chaucer the pilgrim that he is telling the tales exactly as their original tellers did. The Reeve warns the Miller not to tell an adulterous tale:

> The Reve answerde and seyde, "Stynt thy clappe!
> Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye.
> It is a synne and eek a greet folye
> To apeyren any man, or hym defame,
> And eek to bryngen wyves in swich fame.
> Thou mayst ynogh of othere thynges seyn."
> (I, 3144-49)

Yet we have seen how the Reeve may have a personal motive for not wishing this particular tale to be told. Finally, the Miller justifies himself by claiming that he is not telling a tale in order to attack women:

> This dronke Millere spak ful soone ageyn
> And seyde, "Leve brother Osewold,
> Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold.
> But I sey nat therfore that thou art oon;
> Ther been ful goode wyves many oon,
> And evere a thousand goode ayeyns oon badde.
> (I, 3150-55)

In fact, the Miller has outlined his motives in telling this tale earlier in his Prologue:

> The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,
> So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
> He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
> Ne abyde no man for his curteisie,
> But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,
> And swoor, "By armes, and by blood and bones,
> I kan a noble tale for the nones,
> With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale."
> (I, 3120-27)

The Miller wishes to "quite" the Knight's Tale, but what exactly does he mean? The Oxford English Dictionary gives many definitions of "quite", several of which are relevant. "To quite" can mean to do one's part, to remit a debt, to requite, and most interestingly: "to make a return to (a person) for (something done, a benefit, or an injury received, etc.)."[29] The Miller is making a return to the Knight for his tale, and he will repay it by showing up where it, to his mind, lies. In order to best show up the defects he sees in the Knight's Tale, the Miller must tell a tale which parodies the Knight's. He does this by telling a fabliau.

A fabliau is a humorous tale, usually involving sexual or scatalogical content. The characters are usually from the lower class, and the plot revolves around one character's attempt to trick another. Often the fabliau incorporates a form of rough justice. Moreover, the fabliau is often a deliberate parody of courtly love, such as is portrayed in the Knight's Tale. By playing upon the emblems of courtly love, the Miller ensures that his tale is a parody which mocks the Knight's pretensions and naïveté. Nicholas is portrayed as a courtly lover; he imitates the actions of a courtly lover, with a difference. Nicholas is in love with Alisoun, and following the courtly method, he declares his love for her, claiming that he will die unless she reciprocates this love:

> And prively he caughte hire by the queynte,
> And seyde, "Ywis, but if ich have my wille,
> For deerne love of thee, lemman, I spille."
> And heeld hire hard by the haunchebones,
> And seyde, "Lemman, love me al atones,
> Or I wol dyen, also God me save!"
> (I, 3276-81)

Nicholas' words are similar to those a courtly lover might use, but his actions are completely inappropriate. Grabbing one's lady in a suggestive manner is not part of the approved ritual of the courtly lover. In his haste, Nicholas conveniently forgets that he must serve his lady long and faithfully; Nicholas will win Alisoun through deeds rather than through words. When Alisoun first denies Nicholas he stays true to the courtly pattern and begs for her mercy:

> This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye,
> And spak so faire, and profred him so faste,
> That she hir love hym graunted atte laste.
> (I, 3288-90)

Again, however, these cries for mercy are undercut by Nicholas' consequent actions. No sooner has Alisoun accepted him than he "thakked hire aboute the lendes weel" (I, 3304). Andreas Capellanus does not suggest how a true courtly lady would respond to such attentions. Alisoun speedily acquiesces to Nicholas' advances; when applied to her, the courtly code looks ridiculous. Absolon is another parody of the courtly lover. He sings songs as service to Alisoun, and he offers her presents as a generous lover should:

> He sente hire pyment, meeth, and spiced ale,
> And wafres, pipyng hoot out of the gleede;
> And, for she was of town, he profred meede.
> (I, 3378-80)

Yet Absolon offers Alisoun presents only because she is of the town and therefore will demand such generosity.

The Miller believes that courtly love is merely ritualized sex: the ritual is a lie; it is pretended courtesy assumed by the higher classes. This is not to say that the Miller believes there is anything wrong with sex, or with the desire for sex, as his rather open philosophy about adultery demonstrates:

"An housbonde shal nat been inquisityf
Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf.
So he may fynde Goddes foyson there,
Of the remenant nedeth nat enquere."
(I, 3163-66)

Sex, or perhaps a woman's genitals, represent God's plenty, which is a good thing. Moreover, it is a thing which does not run out: if he, and his wife, and his wife's lover all desire sex, it does not matter. Not overly jealous, the Miller believes that joy in sex should be acknowledged freely. It is from this attitude that part of the tone of the Miller's Tale springs: the Miller is mocking courtly love, but he is also acknowledging that sex is fun.

The Miller has not thought beyond mocking courtly love, but as A. David points out, there is a system of love and reward and punishment for that love operating in the Miller's Tale. The Miller's Tale depicts natural love.[30] To love naturally is to love according to one's inclination and to love one's like. Natural love ignores all the rules man imposes on love, for instance the rules of courtly love or the rules of marriage. In the Miller's Tale Alisoun is the best proponent of natural love. Alisoun is described in terms of nature; this is the first clue that she will follow the inclinations of natural love.[31] Alisoun loves Nicholas because it is what she wants to do; she does not acknowledge that the rules of marriage bind her. Nor is Alisoun punished for committing adultery, for she has committed no fault according to the precepts of natural love.

Nicholas is chosen by Alisoun because he is a natural lover in the same way she is. Yet Nicholas is punished: he breaks the rules of natural love. Nicholas is more interested in intellectually besting a carpenter and a parish clerk than in his love-making.[32] Although he would blame Nicholas for deceiving John, a patristic reader would argue that the deception springs from lust and that Nicholas is punished for his lust and its attendant sins. However, Nicholas' punishment follows on the heels of mocking Absolon rather than deceiving John:

This Nicholas anon leet fle a fart,
As greet as it had been a thonder-dent,
That with the strook he was almoost yblent;
And he was redy with his iren hoot,

> And Nicholas amydde the ers he smoot.
> (I, 3806-10)

Nicholas is punished for the sin of pride.

Absolon is not a natural lover, and thus he is punished for trying to love Alisoun, who is. Absolon is in love with himself; he is in love with the idea of being a courtly lover.[33] Thus his punishment fits his crime: Absolon is obsessed by appearances and therefore must kiss something which he views as being irreconcilable with a romantic appearance:

> Derk was the nyght as pich, or as the cole,
> And at the wyndow out she putte hir hole,
> And Absolon, hym fil no bet ne wers,
> But with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers
> Ful savourly, er he were war of this.
> (I, 3731-35)

Chaucer makes the most of Absolon's misplaced kiss. Not content with a gentle brushing of lips, Chaucer emphasizes the depth of Absolon's kiss by placing "ful savourly" at the beginning of a line.

John is not a lover of any sort, much less a natural lover, and thus he is punished in a manner which has no sexual overtones. John breaks his arm and is mocked by his neighbours. The characters in the Miller's Tale are punished according to the crimes they commit against natural love, and thus the fabliau tradition of justice at the end is upheld.

If we return to a patristic reading, the reasons for the punishments become different. Robertson attaches a different meaning to each of the punishments in the Miller's Tale. According to his reading each male character is punished for the sin he commits. John is punished for avarice; Absolon is punished for vainglory; Nicholas is punished for lechery.[34] Chaucer chooses to portray these particular sins because they are the sins through which Adam fell and the sins which Christ overcame. The Miller's Tale is reenacting man's fall from grace.[35] Robertson, however, does not account for Alisoun's escape. She too should be punished for lechery. As well, M. Bloomfield disagrees with

Robertson's account of the punishments: John has, to Bloomfield's mind, committed no crime, and therefore should not be punished.[36] Robertson's failure to account for Alisoun's escape does not negate his interpretation of the tale. Instead, it demonstrates that there is more to the Miller's Tale than Robertson is willing to admit. Robertson's reading should not be ignored, for it illuminates one aspect of the tale, and can be applied in ways he did not anticipate.

In order to facilitate his patristic reading of the Miller's Tale, Robertson elucidates the medieval theory of music. However, the medieval theory of music can be used to interpret the Miller's Tale in more than one way. Part of the medieval theory of music came from the Christian adoption of the harmony of the spheres. According to this model, the universe consists of concentric spheres, each of which revolves at a different speed. There are eight spheres, and as each revolves it plays its own note, creating celestial music which man cannot hear. St. Augustine adapted this model of the universe to Christian theology, and it was still accepted doctrine in Chaucer's time.[37] Thus music also became a factor in astrology, and nature's existing forms were termed "frozen music."[38] Music, therefore, became synonymous with the harmony of the spheres, for, according to St. Augustine, man's music imitates the unheard music of the cosmos, which is God's.[39] Because God created the universe and set the spheres in motion, music also came to represent divine love.[40]

As well as the harmony of the spheres, Christians also adopted the pagan gods for use as symbols. The pagan Venus, the goddess of love and beauty who presides over sex, was adopted and Christianized. The Christian Venus has two faces. She is Venus who rebels against Nature and encourages illicit love. She is also the legitimate Venus who works with Nature and rules chaste love. In this latter incarnation Venus is called *mundana musica*, the music present in the world.[41] Boethius, who became the standard medieval authority on music, gives a more detailed account of *mundana musica* and the two other types of music which relate to man:

> *Mundana musica* is the music of the spheres, the rhythm of the seasons, the harmonious combination of elements. *Musica humana* is the harmony of body and soul, the accord of rational and irrational within the soul and of the diverse elements within the body. Finally,

> *musica in instrumentis constituta* is the audible embodying (in the "instrument" of the human voice as well as in other instruments) of these ethereal harmonies.[42]

Through Venus' link and through the nature of music, love and music become linked in several ways. Divine harmony, the music of the spheres, symbolizes God's love. Presided over by Venus, chaste love on earth is part of God's love; God's love on earth is *mundana musica*.[43] Partaking of chaste love is partaking of God's love. The harmony of body and soul, of accord within and without, is also the creation of music. Even an immoral connection exists between love and music: partaking of illicit love can be called following the Old Dance, the dance of fornication.[44]

According to Robertson's patristic interpretation, the music in the Miller's Tale condemns Alisoun and Nicholas. By introducing music while they are committing adultery, Chaucer is indicating that they are part of the Old Dance.[45] Although this interpretation cannot be denied, it is still the response of only one kind of reader. Chaucer built a more complicated response into the Miller's Tale.

As well as committing adultery, Alisoun and Nicholas, in responding to the urges of natural love, are praising God. In the Middle Ages it was believed that true Christians must use to their fullest extent the gifts bestowed by God.[46] God made Alisoun and Nicholas attractive and gave them the ability to enjoy making love; they praise God by using His gift. The melody of their love-making is part of the world's music and thus partakes of the divine harmony, if only in a small way. When they make love, Nicholas and Alisoun harmonize their bodies and souls; they align their desires within with circumstance without. Participating in divine harmony is a good thing; it is praising God for His creation. There also is a certain amount of praise implicit in making music. In the Middle Ages the study of music was the study of aesthetic principles; it was the study of something beautiful and something good.[47] Nicholas and Alisoun are partaking of this same goodness and beauty. Although they do not create *musica in instrumentis constituta* while they are making love--Chaucer does not tell us that Nicholas sings to Alisoun then--Nicholas' and Alisoun's love-making has a musical accompaniment. Moreover, it is religious music which is associated with the lovers; they are partaking in something holy.

The music in the Miller's Tale is not set up for the purposes of satire and didacticism. Chaucer juxtaposes the adulterous surface of the tale with a background of religious music for humour and incongruity.[48] Gellrich, in his examination of the parody of medieval music in the Miller's Tale, states: ". . . what the tale's comedy does relate is Chaucer's own music: the music of human love that involves passion, marriage, lust, vanity, and adultery--all encompassed by the harmony of praise to the Creator."[49] While the musical background of the Miller's Tale can be used to support a joyous response to the tale as well as a patristic reading, the tone of the tale promotes acceptance rather than condemnation.

The Miller is concerned with telling a humorous tale that points up the flaws of courtly love. In this regard, the Miller is an appropriate teller for his tale. Chaucer has set up the character of the Miller in such a way that we can accept this tale of him. We are not surprised when Chaucer the pilgrim warns us that the Miller is a churl and that we must therefore expect a churl's tale from him. Chaucer has also set up the musical background before we even begin reading the tale. The Miller plays bagpipes:

> A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
> And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.
> (I, 565-6)

Like the rest of the musical background, the bagpipes can be interpreted patristically, or as another instance of mirth. Bagpipes can symbolize the penis and scrotum.[50] According to a patristic reading the Miller is leading the pilgrims in the Old Dance. On the other hand, the bagpipes provide music to enliven the company, and the Miller is showing his joy in the world God has created; he is praising with his music. This interpretation also allows the reader to accept the Miller as the teller of his tale, for the Miller is a lusty fellow who would tell a lusty tale and enjoy the game.

But could the Miller really tell the tale assigned to him? Although having the Miller as teller is appropriate for the tale's two major readings, the learning in the tale is beyond the Miller's potential: the tale is too sophisticated. Chaucer is the actual teller of the Miller's Tale, just as he really tells all the Canterbury Tales. The two readings, the patristic and the worldly, are also Chaucer's readings. In the Miller's Tale Chaucer acknowledges both the truth of doctrine and the truth of vitality. The surface of the Miller's Tale is one of joy and human delight, yet this delight runs counter to religious doctrine and thus counter to the ideal. Underlying the surface of the tale is a network of religious emblems which establishes the ideal against which the characters fail. By manipulating religious emblems, Chaucer establishes a complicated series of parodies which allows for the two different audiences. However, parody alone cannot account for the strength of the worldly reading against the patristic. The exuberant tone of the tale reconciles the ideal with the human; the ideal embraces and accepts the human. The pilgrims see only the surface of the tale; their response is spontaneous and uncomplicated: they laugh. A patristic reader perceives the underlying doctrine as condemning the characters for their actions.

As part of the pattern of the conflict between the human and the ideal, the Miller's Tale is the secular tale which encourages the patristic reader to be forgiving. Yet the sin depicted in the Miller's Tale is not one which may be taken lightly; the Parson makes clear the magnitude of this crime:

> Understoond eek that Avowtrie is set gladly in the ten comandementz bitwixe theft and manslaughtre; for it is the gretteste thefte that may be, for it is thefte of body and of soule./ And it is lyk to homycide, for it kerveth atwo and breketh atwo hem that first were maked o flessh. And therfore, by the olde lawe of God, they sholde be slayn. (X, 887-88)

Although we cannot be sure of the Wife of Bath, we are certain that May and Damian commit adultery. At the very least, the Wife is guilty of lust. As well, both tales are liberally seasoned with religious emblems. Superficially they resemble the Milller's Tale; however, the Wife's and the Merchant's tones determine how their tales should be read. A linear pattern of narrowing vision grows in these three tales; only with the Parson's Tale does the pattern spiral back to acceptance of human faults. In his tale, however, the Parson explains how people may strive for the ideal rather than passively accepting forgiveness or condemnation.

III. The Wife of Bath

Like his Miller, Chaucer's Wife of Bath is concerned with sex and its morality; however, she gives a direct defense of sexuality rather than a delightful tale; her tone is consequently more strident and less confident. Parody in the Miller's Tale brings together two diverse and seemingly conflicting audience responses: the patristic and the worldly. Response to the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale is similarly split, and her tone does less to resolve the conflict than does the Miller's. The patristic response to the Wife's Prologue is inherent because of her constant references to scripture; the Wife of Bath herself provides the second, worldly response. Although Chaucer depicts some pilgrim response to the Wife's Prologue and Tale, he depicts even more strongly the Wife's own reactions. She anticipates responses from her audience: dealing with responses as they occur, responding to her own words, in each case the Wife of Bath demonstrates how she wishes to be understood. The Wife of Bath is the pilgrim Chaucer chooses to have speak for the world; she talks about and demonstrates the world as she experiences it, rather than as it would be if people lived according to the ideals of doctrine. Even while she defends her point of view with vigour and authority, the Wife of Bath is aware that the purely worldly is inadequate.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, like the Miller's Tale, incorporate parody, especially scriptural parody. However, unlike parody in the Miller's Tale, parody in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale does not reconcile patristic response with the Wife's own. Because she misapplies doctrine and defends her right to do so, the Wife denies a reconciliation between the patristic and the worldly. Parody enables the reader to perceive and even to value both responses simultaneously; however, Chaucer has cast the limitations of the Wife of Bath's point of view in relief. The Wife of Bath is not completely confident in her own response; there is an underlying sadness to her Prologue which suggests that the rules by which she lives have not provided full satisfaction. The Wife's sadness lends force to the validity of the patristic response.

For the Wife of Bath there are two codes of behaviour: the actual and the ideal. The actual is the way in which she herself behaves. She recognizes that the world is not ideal, especially for a woman, and struggles to make her place in it. If in her struggle the Wife opposes certain doctrinal precepts, she does not repent; these rules must be broken in order that she may live in the greatest possible comfort. To live under the ideal code of behaviour is to follow doctrine and to live by the rule of charity. The Wife of Bath can conceive of such a code, but she cannot apply it to her own life. The Wife knows the rules and arguments of the ideal code of behaviour; she often refers to doctrine in her Prologue, even though she is arguing for her own way of life. Only in fiction can the Wife conceive of people following an ideal: she portrays this in her tale. Aware that she is missing something, that her own way of life is imperfect, the Wife of Bath unconsciously contributes to the patristic condemnation of her point of view. The Wife insists that there are two ways of perceiving the world, and although her way has limitations, she understands no other and therefore defends it. The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale narrow the vision examined in the Miller's Tale: again the actual and the ideal are compared, but this time the flawed actual must be regretfully rejected.

One pervasive feature of the Wife of Bath's religious parody is that her Prologue and Tale loosely follow the form and rhetoric of a medieval sermon. She is no doubt aware of this resemblance and employs it consciously for the effect it will have on her audience. Both A. David and J. Boren mention the resemblance, but do not elaborate upon the qualities which constitute it.[1] Robertson also calls the first part of the Wife's Prologue a sermon and discusses it in those terms.[2] C. E. Shain details the form and the rhetoric of sermon popular in Chaucer's time and draws some parallels to the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. A sermon always has a thesis and invokes authorities in order to help prove the thesis.[3] An exemplum, a short story, is told at the end of the sermon to demonstrate the thesis. The Wife of Bath only loosely follows this form, but her lack of precision and structure do not detract from the sermon form: a less formal style of sermon was popular in Chaucer's time.[4] According to Shain, "the relation of the parts to the whole is the essence of medieval sermon making";[5] the Wife of Bath follows this most important precept of medieval sermon making; everything she says relates to marriage.

As well as following the form of a medieval sermon, the Wife of Bath employs sermon rhetoric. She uses symbolism, both obviously in similes, and more subtly through a series of related images. Symbolism is one of the main devices of the medieval sermon.[6] As a priest's would be, the Wife's symbols and her authorities are drawn from scripture.[7] Didacticism and appeals to the audience both being rhetorical tricks of the medieval sermon-maker,[8] the Wife of Bath both dictates and appeals to her audience:

> "Thus shulde ye speke and bere hem wrong on honde;
> For half so boldely kan ther no man
> Swere and lyen, as a womman kan."
> (III, 226-28)
>
> "But that I praye to al this compaignye,
> If that I speke after my fantasye,
> As taketh not agrief of that I seye;
> For myn entente is nat but for to pleye."
> (III, 189-92)

Although she claims to be only playing, the Wife of Bath employs the sermon form because of the predictable effect it will have on her audience. At one step further back from the work, Chaucer is also deliberately employing the sermon form.[9] By using a form his audience associates with solemnity and divine truth, Chaucer wishes to point out the importance of what the Wife is saying, to draw attention to the doctrine she employs, and to force the recognition that the doctrine is not being suitably applied.

The Wife of Bath claims authority to give a sermon on her chosen subject, marriage, even though doctrine states that she is unqualified to give such a sermon:

> "Experience, though noon auctoritee
> Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
> To speke of wo that is in mariage."
> (III, 1-3)

The Wife claims experience as her teacher, but she does not deny the voice of authority; she even employs church authority in pursuit of her theses. That the Wife should feel herself qualified to preach at all condemns her under a patristic reading. As part of the lay folk, the Wife of Bath should not preach, nor interpret the Bible herself.[10] The Wife of Bath is not only of the lay folk, she is also excluded by gender from ever becoming one of the clergy. More importantly, the Wife's doctrine is wrong: she defies church standards and misuses her authorities. Robertson gives a scholarly and critical exploration of the faults of the Wife's exegesis.[11] His account is so complete that there is no need for me to rehearse it further; I will touch on it only where it becomes particularly relevant for depicting the Wife's misapplication of doctrine in defense of the world and her lack of spiritual understanding. The Wife of Bath leaves herself open to criticism by assuming a role denied her by her society; she adds to the first wrong by misusing sacred authority.

Unlike the normal medieval sermon, which had one thesis, the Wife of Bath's sermon has three major theses: her right to remarriage, her right to reject virginity, and her right to sovereignty in marriage. To a patristic reader, the Wife places herself in the wrong: she takes positions which contravene the spirit of church doctrine, even though they conform to the letter. The Wife advocates remarriage:

> "Eek wel I woot, he seyde myn houbonde
> Sholde lete fader and mooder, and take to me.
> But of no nombre mencion made he,
> Of bigamye, or of octogamye;
> Why sholde men thanne speke of it vileynye?"
> (III, 30-34)

The church did, in fact, allow for remarriage. St. Jerome allowed for second, and even third marriages in order to prevent fornication, but he did not believe such marriages to be good.[12] Augustine, more liberally, stated that a woman is blessed if she remarries after her husband's death; however, she is more blessed if she remains a widow.[13] The Wife of Bath is within her rights to remarry, but she goes against the spirit of the doctrine and thus begins her argument without full authority behind her.[14]

The Wife's discussion of virginity and her claim of the right to reject it follow a similar path. The Wife of Bath does recognize that virginity is a superior state of sexual being:

> "I graunte it wel, I have noon envie,

> Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamye.
> It liketh him to be clene, body and goost;
> Of myn estaat I nyl nat make no boost.
> . . . .
> "Virginitee is greet perfeccion."
> (III, 95-105)

The Wife, however, rejects such perfection for herself. Her justification is given earlier:

> "And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,
> Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?"
> (III, 71-72)

If everyone were a virgin, then there would be no further virgins in the world. In effect, the human race would die out. The Wife of Bath's justification is fallacious: Augustine dealt with this argument. According to him, if there were no further procreation the end of time would hasten, the City of God filled more quickly.[15] Those who procreate are retarding the populating of God's City. Again, the Wife of Bath is within her rights but is mistaking the spirit of the doctrine.

The Wife of Bath's final thesis is that she has the right to sovereignty in marriage:

> "An housbonde I wol have, I wol nat lette,
> Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
> And have his tribulacion withal
> Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.
> I have the power durynge al my lyf
> Upon his propre body, and noght he."
> (III, 154-59)

Sovereignty in marriage is the thesis upon which the Wife spends most of her time and energy, and for this thesis the Wife has the least authority. Scripture gives the wife sovereignty over her husband's body, but also gives the husband sovereignty over his wife's body.[16] The Wife of Bath chooses to ignore the second half of this verse. Because of its importance, I shall return to this thesis later. First I wish to examine the scriptural emblems surrounding the Wife of Bath. Almost all scriptural references disappear once the Wife begins to deal with her thesis of sovereignty in marriage. For this thesis the Wife truly depends on her own experience rather than religious authority. However, not only the Wife of Bath employs scripture. Some of the religious references surrounding the Wife are Chaucer's; he uses them to describe her, and, by implication, to judge her. Chaucer and the Wife employ scriptural emblems for different purposes, but in each case the parody demonstrates an underlying darkness to the Wife's claims and behaviour.

Chaucer begins his use of scriptural emblems in relation to the Wife of Bath in her General Prologue portrait. This portrait consists not of what the Wife says about herself, but rather of what Chaucer says about her. In describing her, Chaucer invokes two religious ideals, the good woman of Proverbs and the Virgin Mary, women who both resemble and differ from the Wife of Bath. The Wife of Bath is a parody of these ideals, and Chaucer is comparing her with them. Chaucer's voice is not as obvious in the Wife's Prologue, for there she is speaking. Chaucer does not allow his creation as clear a grasp of doctrine as he, himself, possesses, and as he expects his audience to possess. Occasionally the Wife draws upon a religious emblem without realizing the full implication of the doctrine behind that emblem. Although the Wife's use of scripture is deliberate, she is ignorant of the doctrine behind the scripture and thus Chaucer invokes judgement upon her.

The General Prologue portrait of the Wife of Bath alludes to the good woman of Proverbs.[17] Strength, weaving, making business decisions, dressing well--all of these are attributes which the good woman and the Wife of Bath have in common.[18] Between the Wife of Bath and the good woman there exists enough similarity for the allusion to be possible. However, the good woman is more than the Wife, and the Wife of Bath in her Prologue provides a strong contrast to these other qualities. The good woman is obedient to her husband; she speaks well and wisely; she has children. Above all, the good woman fears God. The differences exist for the purpose of parody and this parody demands judgement: the Wife of Bath suffers when compared with the good woman of Proverbs.

Another, less obvious emblem is provided by Chaucer's mention of the Wife of Bath's skill at weaving. The Virgin Mary was a weaver who was said to be able to weave without a seam.[19]

> Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt,
> She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.
> (I, 447-48)

Because the worship of the Virgin Mary was so strong, even such a slight emblematic allusion as this one could provoke comparison. The implicit comparison of Mary and the Wife, not only for the weaving, demonstrates the Wife's inadequacies, for she is neither a virgin, nor a mother, nor a model of obedience to God. It is in her Prologue that the differences between the Wife of Bath and the good woman of Proverbs or the Virgin Mary emerge, and it is there that Chaucer invites the reader to judge her.

In her Prologue the Wife of Bath uses scripture while either ignoring the implications of the doctrine, or while she is unaware of the spiritual meaning. She expresses the wish to be sexually refreshed as often as Solomon was:

> "Lo, heere the wise kyng, daun Salomon;
> I trowe he hadde wyves mo than oon.
> As wolde God it were leveful unto me
> To be refresshed half so ofte as he!"
> (III, 35-38)

The Wife of Bath makes this statement about herself, not realizing the implications of her remark. Augustine claimed that the people of the Old Testament did not have the choice of abstinence, and had many wives not because they were lustful, but because they were obeying the law of procreation. Thus it was only husbands who could have more than one spouse: one man can impregnate many women, but one woman gets no more pregnant from many men.[20] The Wife of Bath is asking to return to the rules before Christ, the Old Law of God's anger rather than the New Law of God's love.[21] Moreover, Solomon was castigated for loving women too much.[22] Solomon's love for women led to his fall from wisdom and to his idolatry. Because the Wife of Bath ignores or is unaware of the consequences of Solomon's actions, she desires to emulate him. Chaucer gave this pilgrim much knowledge of scripture, but he did not give her enough. Through her unconscious misapplications of doctrine, Chaucer demonstrates the gaps in the Wife's understanding. Like Solomon, she has made wrong choices and is often unaware of the connection between her choices and their consequences.

Despite the gaps in her understanding, the Wife of Bath is usually aware of the comparisons she invokes between herself and a religious emblem. In fact, the Wife deliberately draws upon the Bible to add the weight of authority to her arguments. Her use of doctrine may be literally correct, but it is most often uniquely applied and twisted to suit her purposes. The first section of the Wife of Bath's Prologue is liberally sprinkled with references to wells, vessels, shoes, and other objects which have holes to be filled. R. A. Peck argues that these references are yonic, and that the Wife is making the connection deliberately.[23] Wells, vessels, and shoes are not only yonic, they are also meant to be used; by implication the female genitals are also meant to be used. This is a gentle text the Wife of Bath can truly understand. Because the yonic symbols are biblical, the symbol pattern seems to give scriptural sanction to the Wife using her genitals for sex.

However, because the well and the vessels the Wife mentions are biblical, they carry connotations of their own, connotations beyond those the Wife applies. The well is that of the Samaritan woman who recognizes Christ as a prophet. Robertson argues that the Wife of Bath is a parody of this woman, especially as both are given the similarity of having five husbands, and the Wife is condemned by the implicit comparison. Unlike the Samaritan woman, the Wife fails to recognize and to follow the teachings of Christ.[24] The vessels perform a similar condemnatory function: in calling herself a wooden vessel, the Wife of Bath places herself among the damned.[25] In each case the Wife of Bath uses only as much of the scriptural allusion as will help her; the rest she ignores and it must be supplied by the learned reader. If the learned reader is also patristic, the Wife is condemned for her failure to apply or recognize what she knows concerning doctrine.

The Wife of Bath not only implies her genitals are for use through her elaborate yonic symbol pattern, she also states it directly:

> "Telle me also, to what conclusion
> Were membres maad of generacion,
> And of so parfit wys a wight ywroght?
> Trusteth right wel, they were nat maad for noght.

Glose whoso wole, and seye bothe up and doun,
That they were maked for purgacioun
Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale
Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,
And for noon oother cause, --say ye no?
The experience woot wel it is noght so.
So that the clerkes be nat with me wrothe,
I sey this, that they maked ben for bothe,
This is to seye, for office, and for ese
Of engendrure, ther we nat God displese."
(III, 115-28)

In this particular case, doctrine agrees with the Wife. Aquinas states that the genital organs are made for copulation.[26] However, as B. F. Huppé points out, "ese" means use, not abuse;[27] the Wife should exercise moderation in her sexual desires. Having no desire to exercise moderation, the Wife goes so far as to call the penis blessed:

"Why sholde men elles in hir bookes sette
That man shal yelde to his wyf hire dette?
Now wherwith sholde he make his paiement,
If he ne used his sely instrument?"
(III, 129-32)

"Sely" means blessed, and G. Cooper argues that the penis is blessed because it is used to engender children;[28] the Wife of Bath, however, seems to be thinking more of sexual pleasure than of procreation. Finally, the Wife of Bath refers to her own genitalia as blessed. One of her euphemisms for her genitals is *quoniam* :

"And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,
I hadde the beste *quoniam* myghte be."
(III, 607-8)

Quoniam is Latin for "for" or "because"; moreover, "*quoniam* is the opening word of the final doxology of the Gloria, itself the preeminent hymn of praise in the opening moments of Mass."[29] By designating her genitalia *quoniam*, the Wife of Bath is attributing to them a unique holiness and majesty that is God's.[30] Using God's gifts is a way of praising Him, and the Wife of Bath is happy to praise God in this manner as often as possible. The patristic reader sees neither the joke nor the earnestness of what the Wife is saying; he sees only the blasphemy.

The type of parody the Wife employs when expounding on the use of her genitalia is slightly different from the parody examined earlier. It is still repetition with a difference. However, instead of repeating a plot, or a set of qualities, as was done in the Miller's Tale, the Wife repeats a single word to which are attached rich religious associations. These associations are then projected onto the word in the context in which the Wife employs it. The repetition exists in the preserved associations of the word; the difference exists in the often incongruous context. The Wife is deliberately attributing holiness to her genitals. Although the patristic reader does not laugh, this parody is funny and does not condemn the Wife precisely because it is so outrageous; the Wife's pride in her sexual prowess is ingenuous, and when the worldly reader in us responds to the worldly teller in her, we cannot help laughing with her.

The Wife again employs parody when she compares the kind of sexual refreshment she gives with the barley loaves with which Christ fed the five thousand:[31]

> "Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,
> And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed;
> And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan,
> Oure Lord Jhesu refresshed many a man."
> (III, 143-46)

By connecting sexual refreshment and the miracle of the loaves, the Wife not only implies that sex is good, and spiritually refreshing in a way of which Christ approved, she also places herself within the realm of doctrine even though she is not pure wheat bread, not a virgin. Robertson, however, argues that the Wife is identifying herself once again with the Old Law and is ignoring the New Law and the coming of Christ. He claims the medieval exegetes labelled the five barley loaves the five books of Moses. Christ reaffirms these books, but also goes beyond their teachings. The Wife refuses, according to Robertson, to accept the new teachings of Christ.[32] The Wife of Bath deliberately draws upon religious emblems in order to strengthen her arguments; however, because her allusions invoke an ideal standard against which she falls short, she appears unreliable, and her arguments are undercut.

The Wife of Bath draws upon scripture to defend the first two theses of her sermon. She has the right to remarry, and she has the right to reject virginity. Although she ignores the spirit of the law, the Wife is obedient to the letter. I shall now address the third thesis of the Wife's sermon. For her third thesis the Wife has little church authority, only a Bible verse with its second half missing, and this section of her sermon has very few religious emblems. The Wife of Bath claims the right to sovereignty in marriage. Like January, the Wife of Bath makes no allowances for equality in marriage. However, January's desire for wifely obedience has greater doctrinal support than does the Wife's claim of sovereignty. Augustine, for example, clearly states that a wife should be obedient to her husband, but he does not recommend that a husband be obedient to his wife.[33] With so little support, why would the Wife claim a superior position in marriage? In the society of Chaucer's time, woman held the position subordinate to man assigned to her by the New Testament.[34] As can be seen from her portrait, the Wife of Bath does not like to be subordinate to anyone for any reason:

> In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
> That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon;
> And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
> That she was out of alle charitee.
> (I, 449-52)

Marriage is a limited sphere of society in which the Wife can gain dominance, and as such marriage appeals to her, but only when she is the sovereign spouse.

The Wife's methods for gaining sovereignty are shrewishness and sex. By constantly scolding her husbands, the Wife convinces them that they have been unfair; she accuses them of faults they have not committed:

> "Lordynges, right thus, as ye have understonde,
> Baar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde

> That thus they seyden in hir dronkenesse;
> And al was fals. . . ."
> (III, 379-82)

The Wife also accuses her husbands of faults that she has committed, but because she accuses them first, she seems to be innocent; she would not bring such a fault to their attention if she could be blamed for it:

> "Whoso that first to mille comth, first grynt;
> I pleyned first, so was oure werre ystynt."
> (III, 389-90)

Even when using metaphor to describe tactics for winning domestic arguments, the Wife cannot avoid sexual innuendo. She herself is the mill which would gladly be ground.

Sex is the other weapon the Wife uses to gain control in her marriages; however, this weapon will only work if her husbands value sex. The Wife refuses to have sexual intercourse with her husbands until she gets what she wants:

> "Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce:
> Ther wolde I chide, and do hem no plesaunce;
> I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,
> If that I felte his arm over my syde,
> Til he had maad his raunson unto me;
> Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee."
> (III, 407-412)

When she believes she has pushed her husbands too far, the Wife offers them sex in order to placate them, and assures them that she takes no lovers:

> "'What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone?
> Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?
> Wy, taak it al! lo, have it every deel!
> Peter! I shrewe yow, but ye love it weel;
> For if I wolde selle my *bele chose* ,
> I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;

> But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.
> Ye be to blame, by God! I sey yow sooth.'"
> (III, 443-50)

This speech also contains the implicit threat that the Wife will take a lover if her husbands do not appreciate her enough. Through shrewishness and a shrewd control of sex, the Wife manages to dominate her first three husbands.

For the Wife of Bath, as for January, marriage is a commercial arrangement.[35] In her youth, she was bought as a wife, and now she seeks to buy husbands. When she was young and married to old men, the Wife could trade sex for money:[36]

> "And therfore every man this tale I telle,
> Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;
> With empty hand men may none haukes lure.
> For wynnyng wolde I al his lust endure,
> And make me a feyned appetit."
> (III, 413-17)

It was in this way that the Wife controlled her first three husbands. Now she is old; the roles are reversed, and the Wife must buy sex with her money. She hints to Jankyn that he will be rich if he marries her; her dream of him predicted gold:

> "And eek I seyde I mette of hym al nyght,
> He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,
> And al my bed was ful of verray blood;
> But yet I hope that he shal do me good,
> For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught."
> (III, 577-81)

Because she is now dependent upon her husbands for sex, the Wife is no longer in control. She must endure the fact of her fourth husband's mistress; she is willing to make love with Jankyn even after he has beaten her. Is the strong-willed Wife of Bath so submissive merely for the sake of sexual pleasure? A. David contends that the Wife is trying to buy love rather than sex.[37] For the Wife of Bath life has been a commercial venture, and she knows no other way to seek love, yet she would like to be loved for herself. If she cannot have love, then the Wife will settle for sovereignty and the commercial exchange of sex for money.

The pilgrims' reaction to the Wife of Bath's sermon is not a patristic one, nor is it the response of the Wife herself. The Wife's claim for sovereignty in marriage is so absurd that the Pardoner jokes about it:

> Up stirte the Pardoner, and that anon:
> "Now, dame," quod he, "by God and by seint John!
> Ye been a noble prechour in this cas.
> I was aboute to wedde a wyf; allas!
> What sholde I bye it on my flessh so deere?
> Yet hadde I levere wedde no wyf to-yeere!"
> (III, 163-68)

The Pardoner is making a joke: he has no interest in women, and if he did, it is by no means assured that the woman he chooses would be like the Wife of Bath. In his reaction, the Pardoner imitates the typical man to perfection, but he does not criticize the Wife in any way nor imply that her position is untenable. Rather, he believes that she can carry out her threats and thus finds it best to avoid marriage.

The Friar also voices a response to the Wife's Prologue, and his seems equally cordial:

> The Frere lough, whan he hadde herd al this;
> "Now dame," quod he, "so have I joye or blis,
> This is a long preamble of a tale!"
> (III, 829-31)

Despite the Friar's seeming cordiality, both the Summoner and the Wife react as if he has criticized her. The Summoner attacks the Friar for holding up the tale; he may, however, be using any opportunity to criticize the Friar. The Wife, with exaggerated courtesy, begs the Friar's permission to tell her tale, and then pokes fun at friars in general. It may be that the Wife reacts so extremely because she knows that the last thesis of her sermon has no sound theological basis. The end of the Wife's Prologue is not the end of her sermon; she still has her tale to tell; it will be an exemplum of the benefits of allowing a wife sovereignty in marriage.

The Wife of Bath's Tale has often been called a tale of wish-fulfillment. The Wife claims to desire sovereignty in marriage, and her tale demonstrates the happiness of both husband and wife when the wife is given dominance. The Wife of Bath's Tale demonstrates her ideals, and sovereignty in marriage is only one of these. Within her tale, the Wife creates a world where ideals can be applied and they work. Although the ideals of her tale are courtly, the actions in which they result correspond to doctrinal ideals. The tale proves that the Wife understands doctrinal ideals, even though she does not apply them to her own life.

Courtly ideals are the code of behaviour for many of the characters in the Wife's Tale. The knight does not act ideally when he rapes the maiden; however, King Arthur sets that right by invoking the ideal of justice and condemning the knight to death. Queen Guenevere and her ladies portray the courtly and doctrinal ideal of mercy; the knight must fulfill a quest but it will earn him his life. Finally, the loathly lady both explains and portrays the ideal of gentilesse. The loathly lady's exposition of gentilesse is generally considered orthodox, and even the knight learns to act on her advice. When he does so, and yields his mastery over her, the loathly lady reciprocates and does everything in her power to ensure his happiness. Their marriage becomes the doctrinal ideal of mutual love and respect.

The loathly lady of the Wife's Tale is often read as the Wife herself.[38] Such a reading can be supported by the fact that both the loathly lady and the Wife are old, and the Wife dreams of returning to youth as the loathly lady does. As well, the loathly lady marries a husband the Wife would like for herself. On the strength of the similarities between the loathly lady and the Wife of Bath, it is fair to compare the Wife of Bath's actions with the ideal of gentilesse the loathly lady describes in the tale. The Wife of Bath suffers when her actions are compared with this ideal. She wants wealth; she wants status and wants to be recognized for this status; she wants to be physically attractive, and to have an attractive spouse. These are precisely the faults for which the young knight in the tale is scolded. The Wife of Bath understands the ideal and can explain it, but she cannot apply it to her own life.[39]

The Wife of Bath's Tale portrays yet another ideal, the ideal of a loving marriage.[40] From the point of view of both the loathly lady and the knight, the tale has a happy ending.[41] Each has given the other dominance, and each has given the other their desire.[42] The Wife wants such a marriage for herself. She has tried to achieve it: her marriage to the reveler and her marriage to Jankyn were attempts to find happiness and love.[43] The Wife of Bath has been unable to relinquish her desire for mastery; she has not found a man whom she could trust not to abuse his mastery over her. It is only in the world of fiction that the Wife of Bath can believe that following ideals is a viable way of behaving.

The Wife of Bath is unable to fulfill her desires and aware that this is a failing in her own life.[44] Several times in her Prologue the Wife expresses discontent with the way she lives:

> "Allas! allas! that evere love was synne!
> . . . .
> For God so wys be my savacioun,
> I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,
> But evere folwede myn appetit,
> Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;
> I took no kep, so that he liked me,
> How poore he was, ne eek of what degree."
> (III, 614-26)

Her love she acknowledges is sin, for she has loved and desired sex more than she has desired to follow the path of God's righteous folk. Her choices in men, she acknowledges, have not all been good. She has loved not wisely but too well. Even though her love has had negative consequences, the Wife of Bath flaunts and laughs at her experiences. Yet when she talks of her mirthful past, sadness lingers in the Wife's voice; she has not been able to preserve the joy, for it too has failed her:

> "But Lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me
> Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee,
> It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.

> Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote
> That I have had my world as in my tyme.
> But age, allas! that al wole envenyme,
> Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
> Lat go, farewel! the devel go therwith!"
> (III, 469-76)

The Wife of Bath does not linger on the problems of growing old but they arise again in her tale, and the reader is made aware that she has only memories; she has not even taken steps towards securing a sixth husband. Root argues that Chaucer has deliberately placed this touch of sadness in the Wife's voice. Chaucer decides in favour of doctrine: the Wife has not lived according to the ideals she knows and understands: thus she is not happy.[45] Chaucer only lets the mirthful façade slip a little, only enough to show us that there is pain behind the Wife's gap-toothed smile.

An argument can be made, however, that the Wife of Bath does attempt to follow one ideal in her own life. The Wife of Bath has spent her life searching for happiness in marriage, and marriage is the state in which she wishes to find her ideal: she does not seek sex outside of marriage. The Wife argues to her first three husbands that a wife may commit adultery, as long as she also provides for the sexual needs of her husband:

> "Have thou ynogh, what thar thee recche or care
> How myrily that othere folkes fare?
> For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve,
> Ye shul have queynte right ynogh at eve.
> He is to greet a nygard that wolde werne
> A man to lighte a candle at his lanterne;
> He shal have never the lasse light, pardee."
> (III, 329-35)

The Wife does not claim that she follows through on this threat, only that she uses it to dominate her husbands. If they fear she will commit adultery, they will give her what she wants in order to prevent her from doing so. The Wife is, in fact, devastated by the adultery of her fourth husband:

> "I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit
> That he of any oother had delit."
> (III, 481-82)

Her husband's adultery ends the Wife's dream of an ideal marriage. And if she cannot have love, she will make her husband suffer for it. The Wife does not commit adultery, but she gives the appearance of it in order to make her husband jealous:[46]

> "But he was quit, by God and by Seint Joce!
> I made hym of the same wode a croce;
> Nat of my body, in no foul manere,
> But certeinly, I made folk swich cheere
> That in his owene grece I made hym frye
> For angre, and for verray jalousye."
> (III, 483-88)

Even when she flirts with Jankyn, the Wife withholds sex until after marriage; sex is part of the inducement to marriage.[47] The Wife is seeking an ideal which cannot be fulfilled unless she does not make love with Jankyn until after they are married. The Wife of Bath never claims that she commits either adultery or fornication;[48] perhaps she is attempting one ideal by seeking sexual happiness only within marriage.

It may be that the yearning to enact an ideal is not the only reason the Wife of Bath seeks only marital sex. Perhaps part of the reason the Wife does not seek illicit sex is that it would be bad business. As we have seen, marriage for the Wife of Bath is a business venture: sex is exchanged for money. This sort of arrangement is not possible with a lover. Although a lover can be bought, his fidelity cannot, nor does the Wife have recourse to a higher authority should her lover prove unfaithful. And when the Wife was young enough to sell sex instead of buy it, she had no guarantee that a lover might not seek a less expensive mistress. Illicit sex is bad business.

So the Wife is not motivated purely by the desire to have some form of ideal in her life. Perhaps, then, she does commit either adultery or fornication. While describing her in the General Prologue, the narrator is not above casting aspersions on her sexual morality. He says:

> She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye.
> . . . .
> In felawshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe.
> Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
> For she koude of that art the olde daunce.
> (I, 467-76)

These lines are ambiguous. They can be read as meaning that the Wife of Bath is good company and knows charms for love-longing; or they can be read for sexual innuendo. Moreover, as Robertson points out, the mention of the Old Dance links the Wife with fornication.[49] Two lines over which there has been much debate follow:

> Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
> Withouten oother compaignye in youthe, --
> (I, 460-61)

"Withouten oother compaignye" is also ambiguous: does it mean the Wife had no company other than her husbands, or does it mean she had five husbands as well as other company? Both meanings are possible,[50] and I believe Chaucer deliberately left the interpretation open. K. Oberembt believes the Wife of Bath never committed adultery.[51] G. Cigman believes the Wife remained faithful to each husband for as long as he lived.[52] Chaucer calls her the *Wife* of Bath, and this name in itself seems significant. Whether the Wife remains faithful or not, and whether her reason for fidelity in marriage is the search for an ideal or the dictates of good business cannot be proven. However, even if the Wife of Bath is attempting to pursue an ideal by seeking sexual pleasure only within marriage, she is breaking another tenet of doctrine by valuing that pleasure too highly.

Whether or not the Wife of Bath attempts to pursue some ideal in her own life, she does recognize that an ideal code of behaviour exists. In her tale the Wife portrays characters who act according to the dictates of justice, mercy, and gentilesse; she confuses courtly and doctrinal ideals. Most importantly, from her point of view, the Wife portrays a marriage in which the husband willingly gives mastery to the wife, and because he has done so willingly, the wife acts only to please the husband. Within her tale the Wife is striving for an ideal, yet in her life she perceives ideals as something separate and unattainable. The Wife of Bath's parodic use of religious emblems demonstrates that she recognizes the letter of doctrine, but cannot grasp its spirit. Although the ideals portrayed in her tale, her sadness, and her defensiveness all demonstrate her recognition that she has missed some spiritual fulfillment, the Wife of Bath refuses to act according to the dictates of doctrine and is unable to apply the ideal to herself.

In the Wife of Bath Chaucer has created a lively, likeable pilgrim who knows the patristic arguments and nonetheless chooses the world. Because we like her we tend to empathize with the Wife and accept her worldly point of view. But Chaucer does not allow our empathy to remain unchallenged. His parodies of the Wife unfavourably compare her to ideal emblems, and he does not give her a complete understanding of the doctrine she employs. Thus we cannot unreservedly accept the Wife of Bath's way of life. Although the Parson states that there are many ways to reach Christ, we know that the Wife has not chosen any of them:

> Stondeth upon the weyes, and seeth and axeth of olde pathes (that is to seyn, of olde sentences) which is the goode wey,/ and walketh in that wey, and ye shal fynde refresshynge for youre soules, etc./ Manye been the weyes espirituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist, and to the regne of glorie. (X, 77-79)

She does not understand the "olde sentences" and cannot learn from them the right way to live.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale portray a narrower vision of human activity than the Miller's. In both cases the activity examined is sex, and parody is employed to compare the ideal with the actual. Unlike the Miller's, the Wife of Bath's tone does not reconcile the ideal and the actual; she does not have the Miller's confidence that she knows the best way. The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale is the second of three secular pieces I am examining; it shows the pattern of narrowing vision which the Merchant will continue with his tale.

IV. The Merchant

In the Miller's Tale Chaucer depicts the ideal and the actual as interpenetrating; in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale he depicts them as coexisting separately. This pattern of narrowing vision, of limiting possibilities, continues in the Merchant's Tale as the Merchant shows doctrine condemning all the characters. In his tale the Merchant portrays sordid lives: he does not hesitate to show petty evil or to exaggerate stupidity and cunning. The Merchant recognizes how vile his characters are, and he wants his audience to recognize this too. The Merchant's Tale differs from the Miller's and the Wife of Bath's not only in the vileness of his characters but also in his use of parody. Again, religious ideals are invoked through allusion and the ideal is parodied; however, the only effect is to damn the characters. In the Miller's Tale parody joins the ideal and the actual; in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale parody shows the connection, never enacted, between them; in the Merchant's Tale parody serves only to condemn characters who do not even yearn for the ideal. The Merchant's Tale continues the narrowing of vision: Chaucer allows the Merchant to invoke the ideal, but denies the ideal any role except that of condemnation.

To deny any palliative, any hope, to condemn without possibility of redemption, is a very unappealing role, and thus Chaucer has the Merchant play this role rather than himself. As he is with all of the Canterbury Tales, Chaucer is the ultimate teller of the Merchant's Tale; however, in this tale Chaucer very successfully maintains the illusion of the Merchant as teller. Although he is telling the Merchant's Tale and has a purpose in doing so, Chaucer deliberately withdraws himself from view. Chaucer's voice is singularly absent from the tale; we do not hear him ridiculing the Merchant by having him invoke ideals he does not understand. Unlike the Wife of Bath's, the Merchant's understanding of doctrine is complete; like her, he cannot internalize the true value of love and acceptance. Because his understanding is complete, the Merchant's parodies do not backfire, nor does he unknowingly misapply doctrine. These are the acts of the Wife of Bath, and we can perceive Chaucer behind them, pulling the strings and demanding a reaction. We also see Chaucer behind the Wife when in her portrait he unfavorably compares her with religious emblems. In the Miller's Tale Chaucer's voice is not raised to mock the teller; instead Chaucer compliments the Miller by having him deliver a tale in which the learning and style are beyond his capabilities. Only in the Merchant's Prologue and the Epilogue to the Merchant's Tale can the audience perceive Chaucer pronouncing judgement on this pilgrim. For the duration of the tale, it is the Merchant who is in control. The Merchant is well aware of the tone and content of his tale; his allusions and parodies are deliberate. The Merchant himself has made an unhappy marriage; he knows the tricks and treacheries wives will perform, so he tells about unfaithful wives. Because he is bitter about his own experience, the Merchant tells his tale so that every character is worthy only of condemnation.

Chaucer has created a pilgrim whose purpose is to point out the sordid failings of humanity; in telling the Merchant's Tale, Chaucer employs this cynicism for the purpose of creating fertile ground for a larger vision. The Merchant's Tale furthers the linear pattern or narrowing vision started by the Miller's Tale and the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. Through the Merchant's bitter and condemnatory tone doctrine becomes narrow and constraining; the ideal of behaviour is outside the realm of human possibility and exists only to condemn. Chaucer has withdrawn himself from this tale so that it will not be he but rather the Merchant who condemns the characters. Of the tales I examine, the Merchant's Tale presents the narrowest vision, an unhealthy vision which the audience rejects. In this way the Merchant's Tale prepares the reader for the hope that the pattern will spiral back to the widest vision, as it does in the tale with the strongest doctrinal basis.

It is the Merchant, then, who provides for and encourages reader response. The Merchant tells his audience what to think about the characters; he warns them about treachery; he mocks the characters through irony to indicate how the audience should respond. As well, the Merchant employs scriptural parody to produce certain audience responses. As we have seen before, scriptural parody demands a patristic reading simply by being scriptural: the characters who parody the ideal are implicitly compared to this ideal. However, it is not only the patristic reader who condemns the characters in the Merchant's Tale. Even the worldly reader of the Miller's Tale, the reader who forgives Nicholas and Alisoun, often condenms May, January, and Damian. Readership of the Merchant's Tale is split. Although a few readers condemn Nicholas and Alisoun, these are mostly patristic readers such as Robertson. May, January, and Damian are much more commonly condemned, even by those who rejoiced in Nicholas and Alisoun. Nicholas and Alisoun could be forgiven on the basis of the tone of the Miller's Tale; May, January, and Damian are damned by the tone of the Merchant's Tale. However, the Merchant does not invite us to condemn these three characters equally, as I will discuss later. The Merchant condemns his characters for falling short of the ideal code of sexual behaviour, and his tone and comments demand that the reader do the same. Parody in the Merchant's Tale cannot reconcile the ideal and the actual; the characters are portrayed as incapable of understanding, much less attaining, the doctrinal ideal invoked by parody.

The parody is the Merchant's; by absenting his voice from the tale and allowing the Merchant to speak as vindictively as he chooses, Chaucer is absenting himself from making the same judgements as the Merchant. The Merchant's first target for condemnation is January. One major example of the Merchant's condemnation of January can be seen in the pronouncements the Merchant has January utter concerning wives and marriage. January cites scripture for authority in his pronouncements, but he applies only to the letter of the doctrine, not to the spirit. Unlike the Wife of Bath, January seems unaware that the spirit even exists, or that it might be different from the letter. January is condemned not only by his ignorance concerning doctrine, but also by the very mention of doctrine. By referring to doctrine in order to justify his reasons for marrying, January believes he is establishing those reasons as ideal; however, his doctrine is a parody, just as he is a parody of a good Christian man wishing to marry. January's references to doctrine invoke the ideal of which he is incapable, and of which May is incapable. The Merchant, who controls January's actions, condemns him for not understanding doctrine, and the Merchant invites this reaction from his audience. Knowing that January is heading for a fall is not enough to provoke the audience's laughter; January's fall will only be funny if something is gained through it.

Perhaps taking his cue from the Wife of Bath, the Merchant demonstrates that January regards marriage as a kind of barter and will use money to buy sex. However, even more than this, January is buying respectability and comfort. Sex is legalized through marriage, and a wife is always ready to serve her husband's desires. Like the Wife of Bath, January understands only the letter of the law, not the spirit. Even the images

January uses when thinking of his imminent marriage reflect his view of it as a business transaction. In trying to decide upon a wife, January pictures the market where he sees them coming and going:

> Many fair shap and many a fair visage
> Ther passeth thurgh his herte nyght by nyght,
> As whoso tooke a mirour, polisshed bryght,
> And sette it in a commune market-place,
> Thanne sholde he se ful many a figure pace
> By his mirour. . . .
> (IV, 1580-85)

Once he has chosen May and married her, January believes that he in some way owns her.[1] She is his wife and must obey him; she is an object that he must hold. Especially after January goes blind, he needs to touch May so that she always moves within the sphere of his control:

> He paciently took his adversitee,
> Save, out of doute, he may nat forgoon
> That he nas jalous everemoore in oon;
> Which jalousye it was so outrageous,
> That neither in halle, n'yn noon oother hous,
> Ne in noon oother place, neverthemo,
> He nolde suffre hire for to ryde or go,
> But if that he had hond on hire alway.
> (IV, 2084-91)

Even with May always within an arm's reach January is not sure of his control. To gain the control he desires, January offers May money:

> "Beth to me trewe, and I wol telle yow why.
> Thre thynges, certes, shal ye wynne therby:
> First, love of Crist, and to youreself honour,
> And al myn heritage, toun and tour;
> I yeve it yow, maketh chartres as yow leste."
> (IV, 2169-73)

January is offering May a commercial bargain. He has bought sex by buying a wife; now he will try to purchase fidelity. Although January's attitude towards marriage as commerce is not specifically contrary to stated doctrine, his attitude does run counter to the sacramental nature of marriage. Marriage as commerce is not a parody of the ideal of marriage; rather the Merchant is asking his audience to see the shallowness of January's perceptions of marriage. Buying a wife is an action appropriate for a merchant, and this action becomes even more appropriate for this Merchant when we remember the description of his marital happiness. How then can we trust the Merchant to elucidate correctly the ideal of marriage? As we will see, the Merchant has learned from his marriage as January does not.

January uses scripture to justify his beliefs about marriage: he cites famous wives from the Bible who were, he claims, obedient to their husbands. This justification takes place in the so-called "marriage encomium,"[2] the praise of marriage which seems to be spoken in the Merchant's voice rather than January's. I believe that this marriage encomium reflects January's thoughts and is meant to be understood as January's: it is placed between two of January's speeches and is typical of January's attitude. As well, the Merchant seems aware of the true nature of the wives January cites, and given the Merchant's propensities to mock January through January's own willful ignorance, it is easy to believe that he places this praise of marriage in January's mind in order to mock him more thoroughly.

January cites a list of wives from the Bible as proof that wives are obedient to their husbands and ever ready to help their men through good advice:

> Lo, how that Jacob, as thise clerkes rede,
> By good conseil of his mooder Rebekke,
> Boond the kydes skyn aboute his nekke,
> For which his fadres benyson he wan.
> Lo, Judith, as the storie eek telle kan,
> By wys conseil she Goddes peple kepte,
> And slow hym Olofernus, whil he slepte.
> Lo, Abigayl, by good conseil, how she
> Saved hir housbonde Nabal, whan that he
> Sholde han be slayn; and looke, Ester also

> By good conseil delyvered out of wo
> The peple of God, and made hym Mardochee
> Of Assuere enhaunced for to be.
> (IV, 1362-74)

Certainly these women are fine examples of God's servants, and they serve God's will through their advice. However, these are all women who betray men: three betray their husbands, and one betrays the man who would be her lover.[3]

January knows the names of these women but not their complete stories. He cites their names because they are praise-worthy women who have been wives. January praises them, therefore, as wives, but it is not in their wedded state that the virtues for which these women are known lie. By exposing January's ignorance, the Merchant mocks him; his method is parody. January repeats the praise of these women, but with a difference, and does not understand that a difference exists. The audience understands the difference, and thus can mock January. With this same list of biblical wives the Merchant achieves one other small piece of parody. May is implicitly compared with these women because they are being discussed in the context of marriage and she marries January. Like these women, May betrays her husband; however, she is not following a higher law from God when she does so. May follows only her own inclinations, and when set against the religious emblem of these ideal women she suffers. Thus the Merchant condemns May as well as January.

The Merchant again condemns both May and January by citing Sarah and Rebecca in their marriage ceremony:

> Forth comth the preest, with stole aboute his nekke,
> And bad hire [May] be lyk Sarra and Rebekke
> In wysdom and in trouthe of mariage.
> (IV, 1703-5)

May will not be true in marriage, and thus falls short of these ideal examples. As well, Judith, Esther, and Rebecca are Marian prefigurations, and all are implicitly compared to May.[4] May does not measure up to Mary's unstained virtue and according to the patristic reader must be condemned when compared with this ideal. Citing Sarah and Rebecca also condemns January. Sarah and Rebecca represent sacramental marriage.[5] Concerned only with satisfying his lust, January does not think of the sacramental nature of marriage, nor of children and fidelity, the two other goods of marriage. Later I shall demonstrate that although he mentions them, January does not understand the three goods of marriage. Thus the Merchant condemns January by invoking the ideal January should be contemplating.

As well as ignoring the sacramental aspect of marriage, January interprets the marriage vow in his own unique way. In his comparison of marriage and bachelorhood January repeats significant words from the bride's promise in her marriage vow:

> Wel may his herte in joy and blisse habounde,
> For who kan be so buxom as a wyf?
> Who is so trewe, and eek so ententyf
> To kepe hym, syk or hool, as is his make?
> For wele or wo she wole hym nat forsake.
> (IV, 1286-90)

"Buxom", "trewe", "syk or hool", and "wele or wo" are phrases from the bride's marriage vow, phrases which the Merchant's audience would have recognized.[6] These things are indeed promised by the bride. However, January seems to have forgotten that the groom makes a similar promise, and that the husband, too, must care for his wife. Like the Wife of Bath's, January's view of marriage is wholly selfish; he does not realize that he too must make a commitment.[7] January is not consciously parodying the marriage vow, but the Merchant is, and he is demanding a certain audience response. By making his selfishness so obvious, the Merchant sets January up to be scorned and derided.

The Merchant again mocks January's selfishness by having January repeat two lines concerning marriage from Matthew 19: 5-6:[8]

> O flessh they been, and o fleesh, as I gesse,
> Hath but oon herte, in wele and in distresse.
> (IV, 1335-36)

January is thinking only that his wife will share his pain; he does not consider that he may have to share his wife's pain. Again, the Merchant mocks May in this passage. May will be very different from the postulated wife, and the difference will not be in May's favour.

The Merchant does not condemn January merely through the hints and allusions which season January's thoughts, he also condemns January by showing how January misuses doctrine. January invokes the doctrines concerning marriage but twists them so that they may be employed to satisfy his lust. Unlike the Wife of Bath who deliberately and carefully twists doctrine, January seems honestly to believe he is following the doctrinal precepts of marriage. For instance, January attempts to come to terms with Augustine's three goods of marriage. Children, January proclaims, are a good reason not only to marry, but also to perform marital sex. The children of marriage are a kind of praise to God:

> "If he ne may nat lyven chaast his lyf,
> Take hym a wyf with greet devocioun,
> By cause of leveful procreacioun
> Of children, to th'onour of God above,
> And nat oonly for paramour or love."
> (IV, 1446-50)

To bear children and to raise them according to God's laws is certainly one of the goods of marriage, but it is not the reason January wants children. He has stated the real reason earlier:

> "Yet were me levere houndes had me eten,
> Than that myn heritage sholde falle
> In straunge hand, and this I telle yow alle."
> (IV, 1438-40)

January selfishly wishes to keep his inheritance only for his own offspring.

January similarly twists the second good of marriage: fidelity. Because he would be unable to remain faithful to an older, less attractive woman, January states that he must have a young wife:

"I wool noon oold wyf han right for this cause.
For if so were I hadde swich myschaunce,
That I in hire ne koude han no plesaunce,
Thanne sholde I lede my lyf in avoutrye,
And go streight to the devel, whan I dye."
(IV, 1432-36)

Again, January ignores the mutuality of marriage. Why should his wife desire him, who is old, if he will not desire an "oold" woman? January's fidelity is based solely on lust; he demonstrates no virtue in his attempt to follow this good of marriage.

The third and most important good of marriage is the sacramental nature of marriage. Because marriage is man's way of enacting the marriage between Christ and the church, man's marriage takes on some of the divine nature of Christ's marriage. This is its sacramental aspect. Completely chaste, Christ's marriage to the church is a loving relationship which has nothing to do with sex. January is aware of the potential for a chaste marriage, but he will disregard it, even though he knows it to be best:

"Or for that ech of hem sholde helpen oother
In meschief, as a suster shal the brother;
And lyve in chastitee ful holily.
But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I."
(IV, 1453-56)

January will not even attempt to live in the manner he knows to be best: his whole reason for getting married to satisfy his lust. Even in bed January claims doctrinal authority for his sexual play:

"It is no fors how longe that we pleye;
In trewe wedlok coupled be we tweye;
And blessed be the yok that we been inne,
For in oure actes we mowe do no synne.
A man may do no synne with his wyf,
Ne hurte hymselven with his owene knyf;

> For we han leve to pleye us by the lawe."
> (IV, 1835-41)

January claims that in marriage one is allowed to be lecherous; he is ignoring the fact that lust in marriage was considered a venial sin.[9]

In his tale the Merchant uses scripture to condemn his characters, and in the beginning of the tale he condemns January more than May. Made less appealing by being portrayed as lecherous and ugly, January instigates the less-than-perfect marriage. Depicted as silently enduring January's loathesome advances, May wins the audience's sympathy. The Merchant has shown January's lust; he also describes January's failings as a lover:

> He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte;
> With thikke brustles of his berd unsofte,
> Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere--
> For he was shave al newe in his manere--
> He rubbeth hire aboute hir tendre face,
> And seyde thus, "Allas! I moot trespace
> To yow, my spouse, and yow greetly offende,
> Er tyme come that I wil doun descende."
> (IV, 1823-30)

May's revulsion is carefully understated, lending her a heroic stoicism:

> The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh,
> Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh.
> But God woot what that May thoughte in hir herte,
> Whan she hym saugh up sittynge in his sherte,
> In his nyght-cappe, and with his nekke lene;
> She preyseth nat his pleyyng worth a bene.
> (IV, 1849-54)
>
> But lest that precious folk be with me wrooth,
> How that he wroghte, I dar nat to yow telle;
> Or wheither hire thoughte it paradys or helle.
> (IV, 1962-64)

In this manner the Merchant generates sympathy for May at the beginning of the tale. Because she is the seemingly innocent victim of the lust of a revolting old man, and because she endures so stoically, May seems particularly heroic.

However, the Merchant does not allow this sympathy for May to stand. By committing adultery, May becomes guilty; she contributes to making the marriage less than ideal and so must be judged. The Merchant reinforces both his condemnation of May and his bitter tone by first building sympathy for May and then demonstrating that she, too, is fallen. His tone changes from sympathy to scorn. When May takes a lover, the audience feels less sympathy for her. Although we can understand why she takes a lover, May is no longer the stoic heroine more sinned against than sinning, and so we sympathize with her less.[10] As well, by emphasizing the sordid manner of her love-making, the Merchant ensures that the audience will sympathize less with May. The Merchant superficially casts May's infidelity as a courtly-love romance, but emphasizes the adultery and undercuts the romantic qualities by portraying them as absurd. He sets up the typical courtly-love triangle and according to courtly tradition takes his characters from the upper classes of society.[11] However, the Merchant does not tell a courtly romance; his tale is a fabliau, the perfect parody of courtly love.[12] In a courtly romance, the rituals of courtly love lend the affair grace; in a fabliau like the Miller's Tale, courtly love appears hilariously ridiculous; in the Merchant's Tale courtly love lacks both grace and humour. Although they superficially follow the rules and ceremonies of courtly love, May and Damian act with a vulgarity which undercuts any sympathy the audience has for them.

Damian is castigated almost immediately for his love of May. As January's servant, Damian owes January his loyalty; Damian's love for May is a betrayal of his lord. C. Holman argues that this is no different from the position of Lancelot, who is, after all, the achetypal courtly lover.[13] The Merchant, however, is castigating the entire courtly code, and thus Damian's resemblance to Lancelot redeems neither. For the Merchant courtly love is not an ideal, nor does the Merchant see the courtly code as a cloak for natural sexual desire as the Miller does. For the Merchant courtly love is a cloak for lecherous adultery; it hides a mortal sin rather than a human foible. The Merchant ensures that his audience will not see Damian positively; he warns the audience against treachery from servants:

O perilous fyr, that in the bedstraw bredeth!
O famulier foo, that his servyce bedeth!
O servant traytour, false hoomly hewe,
Lyk to the naddre in bosom sly untrewe,
God shilde us alle from youre acqueyntaunce!
O Januarie, dronken in plesaunce
In mariage, se how thy Damyan,
Thyn owene squier and thy borne man,
Entendeth for to do thee vileynye.
(IV, 1783-91)

All the exclamation marks and the dramatic "Oh's" tend to make this narrative comment overstated and perhaps ironic. Can the Merchant really be castigating the lover, the hero of his tale? Damian does, after all, perform the correct actions of the lover: he falls sick; he begs mercy; he obeys his lady's wishes.[14] And the Merchant does not again warn his audience about Damian. He does not need to. The Merchant's description of Damian's love-making is enough to convince any reader who may have had doubts that Damian's motive is lust, just as January's is:

Ladyes, I prey yow that ye be nat wrooth;
I kan nat glose, I am a rude man--
And sodeynly anon this Damyan
Gan pullen up the smok, and in he throng.
(IV, 2350-53)

The Merchant condemns Damian openly for the betrayal of his master, and condemns him more subtly by the manner in which that betrayal is performed.

The Merchant also undercuts May as the lady of a courtly romance. Through her social position and her acceptance of the lover, May is the lady. However, May's acquiescence does not follow the standard months of pleas, gifts, and arguments; she accepts too quickly and therefore her love should be valued lightly. Also lacking traditional courtly grace is the method with which May disposes of Damian's love note:

She feyned hire as that she moste gon

> Ther as ye woot that every wight moot neede;
> And whan she of this bille hath taken heede,
> She rente it al to cloutes atte laste,
> And in the pryvee softely it caste.
> (IV, 1950-54)

The Merchant need not have described where May reads the note or how she disposes of it. Throwing the love-note in the privy casts a whole different light on the "courtly" affair, and the sordid nature of May's betrayal is pointed up by the adverb the Merchant uses to describe her action: "softely." "Softely" is, in fact, how paper would land in the privy, but the adverb is even more appropriate for its ironic comment on May's actions: here the Merchant is demonstrating May's yielding nature; even her acts of throwing are performed softly. January thought he would mould May like wax; she proves to be too hard and too slippery, and it is she who moulds January and his perception of her.

The Merchant is not mocking only courtly love, nor is he mocking only May; he is striking at both simultaneously. If she followed the sentimental pretensions of courtly love, May would secrete Damian's love-letter next to her heart. The privy is a much safer place for the love-letter if she does not want it to be discovered. As May has none of the pretensions inherent in the courtly lady, she should escape the scorn the Merchant directs at the courtly code. However, by surrounding May with the emblems of courtly love and then attacking those emblems, the Merchant, by association, is attacking May.

From a patristic point of view, May and Damian are condemned the moment they undertake a courtly affair: this is adultery. The worldly reader is, however, more likely to sympathize with the young lovers who, after all, belong together. Because he is lecherous, and because he should know better than to choose a wife one third his age, January as a cuckold gains very little sympathy. The Merchant changes the audience's sympathy for May and Damian through his description of them as courtly lovers: they are vulgar and completely lacking in any redeeming virtue. The Merchant cultivates horror and disgust against all his characters. My reading of the Merchant's Tale as sordid is not merely the result of knowing that the Merchant is bitter about marriage because his own is unhappy; the tone of the tale also causes me to feel revolted. Any humour in the tale is very black. Because he is bitter, the Merchant has manipulated the tone to cause revulsion; it is not our knowledge of his marriage alone which causes our reaction.[15]

The same bitterness the Merchant directs at the lovers is alsc directed at January. And in the same way, the Merchant augments that bitterness by first generating some sympathy for January. The Merchant has January sing the Song of Songs to May, and the immediate result of this singing is to generate audience sympathy for January. January awakens one morning when he has been married to May for some time and praises her beauty with the following phrases from the Song of Songs:[16]

> "Rys up, my wyf, my love, my lady free!
> The turtles voys is herd, my dowve sweete;
> The wynter is goon with alle his reynes weete.
> Com forth now, with thyne eyen columbyn!
> How fairer been thy brestes than is wyn!
> The gardyn is enclosed al aboute;
> Com forth, my white spouse! out of doute
> Thou hast me wounded in myn herte, O wyf!
> No spot of thee ne knew I al my lyf.
> Com forth, and lat us taken oure disport;
> I chees thee for my wyf and my confort."
> (IV, 2138-48)

A patristic reader automatically condemns January for this song because January's use of scripture is blasphemous. However, the worldly reader may sympathize with January. By this time May does not look heroic: she is about to betray her husband, and her previous actions have been described in a way that illuminates their vulgarity. January, on the other hand, is attempting poetry; perhaps his feelings for May have become deeper than the lust for which he married her.

The Merchant does not allow this sympathy for January to stand. He immediately comments on January's use of the Song of Songs and undercuts his attempt at poetry: "Swich olde lewed wordes used he" (IV, 2149). The Merchant's comment must shock all but the most patristic reader. January's words are indeed "lewed"--he is demonstrating his ignorance by employing doctrine in a manner which was never intended and which is blasphemous.[17] But January was attempting poetry; he was in the grip of some higher emotion. This is January, the Merchant reminds his audience: January has no higher emotions. The Merchant jolts the reader out of any sympathy he might have felt for January, and removes the love portrayed in the Song of Songs from the realm of human possibility. Because the Song of Songs represents the ideal of marriage, by sneering the Merchant destroys the value of marriage as an ideal ever to be obtained by human beings. In dirtying the theological bases upon which marriage rests, the Merchant encourages the union of the reader's emotional and moral disgust.[18] Through his role as Adam, which I examine later, January becomes the tale's representative of mankind, and he may not even know where the words of his song come from--he certainly does not understand their significance. Governed by his libido, January cannot even contemplate the kind of love that exists between the Sponsa and the Sponsus. The reader is forced to realize not only that Janaury is merely expressing his lust, he is also demonstrating his stupidity: the Song of Songs cannot be applied to May. Addressing May as the Sponsa places her in the position of the Virgin Mary, a position for which she is completely unqualified.[19] Although she did not ask to be compared with Mary, May should strive to be the best she can be so that she may reach heaven. January may not know it, but his wife is definitely not without spot.

January, whether consciously or not, employs scripture when he sings to May. He does not, however, employ parody. The parody is the Merchant's, and he uses it to condemn both January and May.[20] The Song of Songs serves a further purpose: it introduces the garden of the Song of Songs, the *hortus conclusus*. January has built a garden wherein he indulges in sexual play. Robertson points out that gardens are often parodies of the garden in the Song of Songs and of the garden of Eden. As such, the gardens reflect badly on those who visit them for the purposes of lust.[21] January's garden is then really three gardens: January's garden, a love-nest intimately connected with May and sexual pleasure; the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Songs; and the garden of Eden, paradise, which also suggests the paradise earth will become after Judgement Day. By suggesting the two biblical gardens for the purposes of parody, the Merchant ensures that those who enter January's garden will be judged against the religious emblems.

The Eden emblem is perhaps the more immediately obvious of the two. The similarities between Adam and Eve and January and May abound. Both stories describe a husband and wife in a garden. The wife is led into sin by a third party; the sin involves a fruit tree and has sexual implications. The third party has demonic connections. While Eve's tempter was Satan, lord of the devils, May's tempter is Damian, whose very name suggests the *daemon* of ecclesiastical Latin.[22] Differences between the Eden myth and the tale of January and May are, of course, more interesting: they invariably condemn the characters.

In marrying, January believes that he is attaining paradise on earth. This immediately links him to Adam, the one man who actually had an earthly paradise. Like Janus who looks backwards and forwards, unwilling to settle for the lot of fallen man, paradise in heaven after death, January wants his paradise on earth as well as in heaven.[23] January thinks to attain this paradise through marriage. Marriage will prepare his soul for heaven:

> With face sad his tale he hath hem toold.
> He seyde, "Freendes, I am hoor and oold,
> And almoost, God woot, on my pittes brynke;
> Upon my soule somwhat moste I thynke.
> I have my body folily despended;
> Blessed be God that it shal been amended!
> For I wol be, certeyn, a wedded man,
> And that anoon in al the haste I kan.
> (IV, 1399-1406)

More importantly, marriage will provide January with a paradise while he still lives. May, once he marries her, becomes January's earthly paradise:

> And Januarie hath faste in armes take
> His fresshe May, his paradys, his make.
> (IV, 1821-22)

In order to further his paradisal love-making, January builds the garden, and there he performs sexual acts which were beyond his capability outside the garden:

> And whan he wolde paye his wyf hir dette
> In somer seson, thider wolde he go,
> And May his wyf, and no wight but they two;

> And thynges whiche that were nat doon abedde,
> He in the gardyn parfourned hem and spedde.
> (IV, 2048-52)

The garden is representative of May,[24] both from January's point of view, and from the Merchant's. Like May, the garden is enclosed, and only for January's use. Because of its sexual purpose the garden represents May's genitals. The garden is intimately connected with May and with love-making; it is January's garden of paradise.

January, then, has been given Adam's position in Eden: he is the husband in paradise. Adam, according to Aquinas, was the more guilty in the fall of man from Eden.[25] By analogy, January is the more guilty for the failure of his own marriage; however, he does not learn from his failure as Adam does. Adam learns repentance and is given the promise that one day his fall will be redeemed. Despite January's claim that he is marrying to save his soul, he is unwilling to seek the real paradise. He commits the sin of lust in marriage and believes in his illusory paradise so that he need not seek the real one. Once his marriage has failed January does not repent; he refuses to even recognize that there is sin. January, unlike his counterpart Adam, cannot even make the fall that would lead to salvation.

Several minor emblems of the garden of Eden and the *hortus conclusus* exist in the pear tree, the gate, and the key. The pear tree represents the tree of knowledge. This is not unusual as some medieval theologians postulated that the tree of knowledge might have been a pear tree.[26] Further, the pear is considered a phallic symbol, and thus is appropriate to a tree which gives sexual knowledge.[27] Damian is analogous to the snake. He is not a parody of the snake, but is rather a representation of it, and can be seen as equally evil. Parody implies some difference in judgement between the original and the repetition; the Merchant is not contrasting Damian with Satan, he is comparing them. Damian's penis is, symbolically, the key to the garden.[28]

Damian's connection with the *hortus conclusus* is less direct. J. Bugge points out that "wyket" and "cliket" represent female and male genitalia: again Damian's penis is the key; the garden to which he gains entrance is May's vagina:[29]

> On Damyan a signe made she,
> That he sholde go biforn with his cliket.
> This Damyan thanne hath opened the wyket.
> (IV, 2150-52)

The *hortus conclusus* is the enclosed garden, January's garden. Both literally and allegorically, Damian has the key and plays the role of the Sponsus. He also plays the role of the Sponsus by gathering fruit, an appropriate euphemism for Damian's adultery with May.[30] As a parody of the Sponsus, Damian's implicit comparison with the ideal condemns him. He has usurped January's role by gathering the fruit, and he falls short of being the ideal and chaste lover the Sponsus suggests. The garden of Eden and the garden from the Song of Songs are interwoven in their parody, January's garden. Both serve to condemn the characters who interact in this garden by implicitly comparing them with their ideal originals.

Medieval theology linked the tree of knowledge to the cross. By setting up the incredibly acrobatic adultery-in-a-tree, the Merchant manipulates this link and condemns May for more than her infidelity. To the medieval Christian, the tree of knowledge and the cross were the same symbol, except that each was the reverse of the other. The tree was the means of man's fall; the cross was the means of man's redemption. There was even a belief in Chaucer's time that the cross was made from the wood of the tree of knowledge. Struggling with Christ on the cross was an image employed to mean the coming to terms with faith, the opening of one's eyes to God.[31] If the tree and the cross are the same symbol, then when May struggles with Damian in the pear tree, she is also, allegorically, struggling with a man, Christ, on the cross. However, it is not her own eyes that she is opening; May's actions open January's eyes.[32] The whole struggle in the tree is a bitter parody. Damian is no Christ, and May is not a Christian seeking to come to terms with her faith: both suffer badly from the comparison. Even the opening of January's eyes is only literal. May convinces him that he cannot believe what he has seen, and January's eyes remain closed to sin, repentance, and faith.

Two less subtle parodies which condemn May are also linked to the garden. May is a parody both of Eve and of Mary. May plays the role of Eve in the Eden allegory, and although Eve's official portion of guilt is less than Adam's,[33] she was more popularly given the role of blame.[34] May, by analogy, is assigned guilt for her faithless marriage to January, and like January, she is worse than her Edenic counterpart because she does not recognize her guilt and offer penance for it. May is also like Eve in that she demands fruit, and it is this demand for fruit which directly precedes her sin:[35]

> "Now sire," quod she, "for aught that may bityde,
> I moste han of the peres that I see,
> Or I moot dye, so soore longeth me
> To eten of the smale peres grene."
> (IV, 2330-33)

So May is cast in the role of Eve, and it is Eve who closed the gates to paradise. Unconsciously parodying Eve, May opens the gates to "paradise," an act which operates to the detriment of all.[36] May represents Eve and January represents Adam. In Genesis, Adam and Eve are all humanity. By extension, May and January represent all humanity and once again the Merchant's Tale condemns universally. May and January sin mortally and must be damned: is the rest of mankind any different?

Eve was said to have closed the gates of paradise, she was forced to leave Eden, but Mary opened them again by providing the means of man's redemption and access to the paradise earth would eventually become.[37] Like Mary, May opens the gates to paradise, but her paradise is illusory and leads to damnation; May must be condemned for her actions, especially when they are compared with the ideal of Mary. In asking for fruit, May again unconsciously parodies Mary. In "Cherry-Tree Carol" Mary asks Joseph for cherries.[38] Again May suffers through the comparison: she is feigning a desire for pears in order to commit adultery. Implicit in the setting of the garden is a final comparison between Mary and May. The garden of the Song of Songs represents Mary's inviolate virginity.[39] We have seen how January's garden represents May's genitals, and it is in this garden that May practises lust. May can only be condemned by her implicit comparison with Mary, of whom she is a parody.

The Merchant has deliberately woven allusions to the Song of Songs and the garden of Eden around January's garden. January, Damian, the pear tree, and May are parodies of specific emblems from these two pieces of scripture. By using parody the Merchant invites a certain audience response; he deliberately employs scriptural parody in order to ensure a patristic response. Although a patristic reading may not be the only one possible, the use of religious emblems provokes such a reading. The patristic reader of the Merchant's Tale is not so different from that of the Miller's Tale or the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale: he condemns the characters who are parodies of the doctrinal ideals. Both the Miller's Tale and the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale allowed for a different audience response which was not patristic and which did not condemn the characters so thoroughly. The Merchant's Tale does not. Because she perceives them as separate, the Wife of Bath fails to reconcile the ideal and the actual through parody. In the Merchant's Tale human beings are incapable of the ideal: there is nothing to reconcile. The Merchant demands that his audience condemn his characters.

Chaucer has given the Merchant free rein to encourage this condemnation, and has stepped out of view after providing a solid reason for the Merchant's motivation. Is condemnation of his characters the response the Merchant receives? Certainly the Host condemns May, and he speaks confidently. Although he may not be speaking for the rest of the pilgrims, none of them disagree:

> "Ey! Goddes Mercy!" seyde oure Hooste tho,
> "Now swich a wyf I pray God kepe me fro!
> Lo, whiche sleightes and subtilitees
> In wommen been! for ay as bisy as bees
> Been they, us sely men for to deceyve,
> And from the soothe evere wol they weyve;
> By this Marchauntes tale it preveth weel."
> (IV, 2419-25)

The Host, however, does not condemn January, or even Damian. This is somewhat odd as the Merchant condemns January both implicitly and explicitly in the telling of his tale.[40] Perhaps the Host feels no need to condemn January because January so obviously gets what he deserves. Perhaps the pilgrims associate January with the Merchant: modern critics have tended towards the same association.[41] Such an association seems borne out by the Merchant's Prologue:

"Wepyng and waylyng, care and oother sorwe
I knowe ynogh, on even and a-morwe,"
Quod the Marchant, "and so doon other mo
That wedded been. I trowe that it be so,
For wel I woot it fareth so with me."
. . . .
"Now," quod oure Hoost, "Marchaunt, so God yow blesse,
Syn ye so muchel knowen of that art
Ful hertely I pray yow telle us part."
"Gladly," quod he, "but of myn owene soore,
For soory herte, I telle may namoore."
(IV, 1213-44)

The Merchant's disclaimer, that his tale will not be his own story, does not impress his audience as being true. Nor have the modern critics believed January's disclaimer. What man would admit the problems January has with May? Besides, Chaucer often speaks ironically. The pilgrims do not condemn January because they have no wish to insult the Merchant. Modern critics treat January and the Merchant as equally fictitious and feel no compunction about condemning the Merchant.

Does the Merchant see himself as January? The disclaimer from his Prologue could be a device to hide his shame from the rest of the pilgrims, a device which allows him to save face. If this is so, then the Merchant is January, and his harsh condemnation of January is self-castigation for having committed the same mistakes. However, if January truly represents the Merchant in all aspects, by the end of the tale January should also be able to see his own mistakes as the Merchant can see them. January cannot see these mistakes. Perhaps the Merchant used to be January, but he, at least, has made the fall.[42] P. Beidler presents a convincing argument that the Merchant actually sees himself as Justinus. His tale is an exemplum of Justinus' theory of marriage, and he speaks of his own marriage in the same way Justinus does.[43] Having been January, the Merchant now sees the problems with his previous actions and thus can play the role of the wise and prudent Justinus, who knows where his own shoe pinches.

So the pilgrim audience condemns May, but not January. The patristic audience condemns both. Although it would like to feel sympathy for May as a courtly lady and for January who learns to love, the worldly audience also condemns both. The Merchant's tone does not allow for sympathy. How have the modern critics responded? Some have laughed, finding the tale funny. Because of his lust and his stupidity, January has been condemned by most. Because she is first portrayed as heroic and sympathetic, May is condemned less, but she does not escape unscathed. Although there are critics who find the tale funny, more perceive only a black humour. I believe the Merchant wishes us to condemn his characters; I hear only scorn and anger in his voice. Through religious parody the Merchant presents the ideal, the manner in which people should behave according to doctrine. The ideal remains abstract: no one performs it; no one even attempts it. In the Merchant's Tale the ideal is not only separate from actual behaviour, it is irrevocably unattainable and exists only to condemn the actual. In the Merchant's Tale parody does not allow for reconciliation between the ideal and the actual.

The last of the three secular tales I examine, the Merchant's Tale, lands unequivocally on the side of doctrine and the ideal. Although the spirit of the Merchant's Tale does not reflect Christ's love, the doctrine portrayed by the tale is orthodox. Despite his claim to virtue in following the three goods of marriage, January should be condemned; he does not follow the spirit of God's law and desires only to satisfy his lust. The Parson outlines the true reasons sex may be performed in marriage:

> Thanne shal men understonde that for thre thynges a man and his wyf flesshly mowen assemble. The firste is in entente of engendrure of children to the service of God; for certes that is the cause final of matrimoyne./ Another cause is to yelden everich of hem to oother the dette of hire bodies; for neither of hem hath power of his owene body. The thridde is for to eschewe leccherye and vileynye. The ferthe is for sothe deedly synne./ As to the firste, it is meritorie; the seconde also, for, as seith the decree, that she hath merite of chastitee that yeldeth to hire housbonde the dette of hir body, ye though it be agayn hir likynge and the lust of hire herte./ The thridde manere is venyal synne; and, trewely, scarsly may ther any of thise be withoute venial synne, for the corrupcion and for the delit./ The fourthe manere is for to understonde, as if they assemble oonly for amorous love and for noon of the foreseyde causes, but for to accomplice thilke brennynge delit, they rekke nevere how ofte. Soothly it is deedly synne; and yet, with sorwe, somme folk wol peynen hem moore to doon than to hire appetit suffiseth. (X, 939-43)

The Parson even deals with January's claim that husband and wife can practice marital sex as much as they like without performing any sin, and he repeats the same phrase January used:

> And for that many man weneth that he may nat synne, for no likerousnesse that he dooth with his wyf, certes, that opinion is fals. God woot, a man may sleen hymself with his owene knyf. . . . (X, 859)

Following the linear pattern established by the Miller and the Wife of Bath, the Merchant tells the bleakest of these three tales. Again, the vision narrows.

The pattern, however, does not end with the Merchant's Tale. Following the precepts of doctrine, the Parson's Tale forms a spiral pattern at the end of the Canterbury Tales by allowing for the greatest range of human activity without inevitable damnation. The Parson explains the doctrine of repentance. Ultimately, the pattern of The Canterbury Tales leads the reader to an understanding of doctrine. However, by concentrating on the condemnatory aspects of Christian doctrine, the secular tales have not promoted a morality based on love. Therefore Chaucer's retraction of his secular works is not wholly unexpected; yet neither are his Retractions wholly unambiguous.

V. Conclusion: Spiralling Back

The Canterbury Tales is unfinished, but that does not limit the complexity of the tales either individually or as a whole. Most of the tales have more than one possible interpretation, and various methods of critical analysis can be applied in order to reveal the different meanings. In applying the theories of parody and reader response to the Miller's Tale, the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, and the Merchant's Tale, I believe I am examining devices Chaucer consciously manipulated in order to facilitate the interpretations I have discussed.

By assuming a common conceptual background for his readers and by manipulating the emblems and stories of that background, Chaucer employs parody. He identifies an emblem, repeating enough of its characteristics so that it is recognizable, but changing some characteristics so that it is no longer ideal. Through his use of parody Chaucer invites comparison and judgement; the changed emblem invokes the ideal and is judged by the standards of that ideal.

Long before it had been given a name, Chaucer was employing the principles of reader response theory. In assuming that his readers have a common background, Chaucer assumes a certain audience. Because he understands the reader's role as co-creator of a text's interpretation, Chaucer exercises some control over his readers by anticipating their biases and responses. Written into the Canterbury Tales are encouragement of, denial of, and commentary on the responses Chaucer anticipates. Because the response of a real reader is complex, I have chosen to discuss only the responses of the pilgrims and the responses of two fictitious and stereotyped readers: the patristic and the worldly. Parody and reader response are only two of the literary techniques Chaucer employs in the Canterbury Tales, but through examining them we can see how Chaucer establishes both patristic and worldly interpretations of his tales which can exist simultaneously in the mind of a real reader.

By examining the patristic and the worldly responses to three tales, we have seen that The Canterbury Tales portrays a basic conflict between church doctrine concerning sex and the way sex is actually practiced by fallible human beings. Chaucer uses parody to invoke the doctrinal ideals while simultaneously portraying how people actually live and behave. The patristic reader condemns the characters for ignoring doctrine; from his point of view parody invites judgement. For the patristic reader Nicholas, Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, January, and May are all equally guilty of the mortal sin of lust. Although the worldly reader recognizes that these characters are guilty, he measures them against his own failings rather than against the ideal, and he is therefore less willing to judge them. In deciding whether a tale invites judgement or merely comparison, we must recognize the importance of the teller's tone. The Miller's tone encourages a joy, mirth, and acceptance of the characters despite their flaws. Even though she defends the worldly, the Wife of Bath's sadness and defensiveness demonstrate even to the worldly reader that she understands that her way is not the best. The Merchant's pervasive bitterness forces even the worldly reader to condemn May and January. The tone of each tale is not merely that of the pilgrim who is telling it; it is also the tone Chaucer has deliberately chosen for the teller. Chaucer anticipates the responses of the patristic and the worldly reader and accounts for them within the Canterbury Tales; the pilgrims voice these responses both when they are audience and when they are tellers.

The conflict between church doctrine concerning sex and the manner in which people actually live and practice sex reflects a more general concern and conflict in the tales. All people, whether fictitious or real, may disregard doctrine not only in their sexual behaviour, but also in all their dealings with each other. The conflict between doctrine and human behaviour is a conflict between the ideal and the actual. Except for his saints, the characters in Chaucer's tales seem incapable of following the doctrinal ideal of behaviour. The pattern of the three secular tales I have discussed is a linear one of narrowing vision. Human activity gradually becomes so circumscribed by doctrine that people cannot act without risking damnation. Beginning with the Miller's Tale, the tale with the broadest vision, we are shown mortal sin and invited to compare it with a parody-invoked ideal. However, the religious emblems in the Miller's Tale also invoke a second system of values, one which depicts Nicholas and Alisoun as partaking of God's love. Being narrated in a tone of mirth, the tale's portrayal of the divine and the human interpenetrating is reinforced. Less confident than the Miller, the Wife of Bath defends sexual sin by trying to subvert religious emblems and doctrine. Because she views the ideal as separate and refuses to apply it to her own life, the Wife of Bath demonstrates a narrower vision than the Miller. The Merchant's vision is the narrowest. Like the Miller, the Merchant portrays mortal sin and through parody compares it with the ideal. The ideal he portrays is unattainable and he uses it only to condemn. In creating pilgrims to speak for him, Chaucer cleverly relieves himself of responsibility; the pilgrims' attitudes are not necessarily his own. Yet in the end, both we and Chaucer know that he has created the pilgrims and their tales. The pilgrim narrators allow Chaucer to evoke certain responses in his audience and to build a pattern in The Canterbury Tales without compromising his own integrity.

The pattern of narrowing vision is not unique to the Miller's Tale, the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, and the Merchant's Tale, but rather pervades the Canterbury Tales. The question of correct behaviour is a theme in all of the tales. Even those tales which do not directly mention doctrine and have few or no religious emblems, the Reeve's and the Squire's Tales, for instance, deal with correct behaviour. Throughout the Canterbury Tales pursuing correct behaviour follows a pattern of gradual decline: human activities become limited. If we adopt R. Pratt's ordering of the Canterbury Tales,[1] we see that the fabliaux become less humorous and more vindictive. Through the tone of the telling, characters seem to deserve their punishments more with each tale. The Miller's Tale is the most delightful and lighthearted; the Reeve's Tale is funny, but the Reeve's voice has a vengeful edge. Compared with the two above, in my opinion the Merchant's Tale becomes even blacker. The Shipman's Tale is the only fabliau which does not fit the pattern.

The saints' legends necessarily relate the life of one who obeys doctrine; saints' legends are more likely than other tales to portray characters who do not view their actions as circumscribed. As is therefore likely, we find most of the saints' legends near the beginning of The Canterbury Tales where the vision is broadest. However, a progression still occurs. The martyrs gradually find it more difficult to achieve happiness while still alive. While Constance has a loving husband and a child, Virginia dies by her father's hand while still very young. Cecilia lives to defy a prefect and to convert many Romans; the Prioress' little boy never reaches adolescence. As the legends progress, the saints begin to find their happiness only after death. Again, worldly, human activites have become limited. Even the last few of the Canterbury Tales depict a narrowing vision. Inherent in the Monk's tragedies is the narrow vision that everything worsens, no matter how one behaves. With his tale the Manciple demonstrates the same principle. Only the Nun's Priest's Tale relieves the gloom of the end of The Canterbury Tales.

Despite all the evidence in favour of a linear pattern of narrowing vision throughout The Canterbury Tales, the pattern is not as simple as my discussion of three tales suggests. For example, the pattern is not completely consistent; it accommodates neither the Shipman's nor the Nun's Priest's Tales. Because I have not yet discovered a satisfactory interpretation of the ambiguous Franklin's Tale I do not know whether it fits the pattern. Moreover, the pattern I have suggested is by no means the only pattern in The Canterbury Tales; the tales may be ordered so as to accommodate other patterns. We are not sure of the order of the Canterbury Tales, nor do we know whether the order would have changed had Chaucer completed them. I do not believe that the completion of the Canterbury Tales would have brought a greater coherence to the pattern of narrowing vision. Nor do I believe that this lack of mechanical progression invalidates the pattern. Patterns in literary works are not like mathematical formulae, and we should not expect them to function in the same way.

Although I have pointed out the spiralling back at the end of the Canterbury Tales, so far I have closely examined only the linear pattern of narrowing vision. Superficially it would seem that the Parson's Tale completes this linear pattern. The Parson's Tale is the final tale for the Host states that only the Parson has yet to speak:

> For which oure Hoost, as he was wont to gye,
> As in this caas, oure joly compaignye,
> Seyde in this wise: "Lordynges everichoon,
> Now lakketh us no tales mo than oon.
> . . . .
> "Sire preest," quod he, "artow a vicary?
> Or arte a person? sey sooth, by thy fey!
> Be what thou be, ne breke thou nat oure pley;
> For every man, save thou, hath toold his tale.
> Unbokele, and shewe us what is in thy male."
> (X, 13-26)

As the last tale, the Parson's Tale occupies a significant position. The Parson himself comments on the significance of the final tale:

> "I wol yow telle a myrie tale in prose
> To knytte up al this feeste, and make an ende."
> (X, 46-47)

Does the Parson's Tale "knit up" the matter of the Canterbury Tales? Can we trust it as Chaucer's final word on the conflict between the ideal and the human?

As we have seen earlier the doctrine the Parson pronounces is standard for Chaucer's time.[2] As well, the General Prologue portrays the Parson as a trustworthy man. Using no satire or irony in this portrait, Chaucer describes a man who follows the practices a parson should:

> This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,
> That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.
> Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte,
> And this figure he added eek therto,
> That if gold ruste, what shal iren do?
> For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,
> No wonder is a lewed man to ruste;
> And shame it is, if a prest take keep,
> A shiten shepherd and a clene sheep.
> (I, 496-504)

The biblical metaphor of sheep and shepherd also enhances the Parson's credibility. This emblem is not employed as others have been: it is not parodic. Christ uses the shepherd metaphor for himself,[3] and when Chaucer repeats it the meaning is unchanged. The Parson is the ideal; it is not necessary for parody to invoke an ideal with which to compare him.

As well as being an ideal, the Parson tells a tale explicating an ideal: the doctrinal ideal of human behaviour. The Parson details all seven deadly sins and their parts so that his audience will know which of their own actions are sinful and should be avoided. While contemporary, the Parson's doctrine is the most stringent of its time;[4] arguably this harshness reflects Chaucer's desire to be on the safe side of any theological issues.[5] By dealing with the issues presented in the tales, the Parson's Tale comments directly on the conflict between the ideal and the actual. Chaucer's final word seems to be that people should behave according to doctrine; he places the explicit ideal of the Parson's Tale at the end of the Canterbury Tales as a corrective for the immoral behaviour that came before.[6] By placing such strong restrictions on human activity, Chaucer seems to be following the linear pattern of gradually narrowing vision. As a final word, this circumscription of human activity is unacceptable to several modern critics who argue that the Parson's Tale represents only one view among many.

Traditionally read as delivering a code of human behaviour consonant with the teachings of the church, the Parson's Tale was interpreted as a commentary on the whole of The Canterbury Tales. What the Parson recommended for any aspect of human behaviour should be compared to the characters' actions in any given tale. More recently, however, critics have begun to question whether the Parson's Tale is in fact meant to knit up the Canterbury Tales. L. W. Patterson believes that the Parson's Tale was written after many of the tales, but he does not believe that the Parson's Tale can be used to comment upon individual pilgrims.[7] J. Leyerle claims that the Parson's Tale is no more important for commenting on sexual behaviour than any other tale that deals with sex.[8] J. B. Allen goes so far as to deny that the Parson's Tale is the end of The Canterbury Tales; he claims the Retractions are the end, and that the Parson's Tale is part of the middle and should be regarded as such; it should have no importance attached to it because of placement.[9] Chaucer, however, understands the importance of beginnings and endings. In the Miller's Tale Chaucer places the description of Absolon's misplaced kiss, "ful savourly" (I, 3735), at the beginning of the line for emphasis. Although the Host employs a random method for choosing who shall speak first, Chaucer writes the Knight as winner because the Knight's rank should make him first. In Troilus and Criseyde Chaucer constantly anticipates the ending because he knows that the whole will be read in the light of the end. I believe Chaucer's placement of the Parson's Tale to be deliberate: he has placed it in a position where it will be emphasized. Although I can understand why modern critics do not want the Parson's Tale to represent Chaucer's ultimate attitude--they do not like to think of Chaucer's vision as narrow--I believe they have not examined the nature of the Parson's

Tale closely enough.

The response of the pilgrims also indicates that the Parson's Tale is a knitting up of the Canterbury Tales. Earlier we have seen Chaucer encourage or deny certain responses through the voices of his pilgrims: they are last heard in the Parson's Prologue. The Parson is the only pilgrim to request unanimous approval before telling his tale:[10]

> "For which I seye, *if that yow list to heere*
> Moralitee and vertuous mateere,
> And thanne *that ye wol yeve me audience*,
> I wol ful fayn, at Cristes reverence,
> Do yow plesaunce leefful, as I kan.
> . . . .
> And *if ye vouche sauf*, anon I shal
> Bigynne upon me tale, *for which I preye*
> *Telle youre avys*, I kan no bettre seye."
> (X, 37-54; my emphasis)

The Parson receives this approval, and the pilgrims agree that it is best to end with a moral tale:

> Upon this word we han assented soone,
> For, as it seemed, it was for to doone,
> To enden in som vertuous sentence,
> And for to yeve hym space and audience;
> And bade oure Hoost he shoulde to hym seye
> That alle we to telle his tale hym preye.
> (X, 61-66)

The pilgrims' unanimous assent to a moral tale suggests how Chaucer wishes us to receive the Parson's Tale: like the pilgrims we should listen and learn.

Although the Parson's Tale seems to follow the pattern of narrowing vision by detailing man's potential sins, the Parson's Tale moves from the linear to the spiral by offering a way out of sin. The tale is about repentance, and implicit in repentance is the grace God grants despite the imperfections of people:

> But nathelees, men shal hope that every tyme that man falleth, be it never so ofte, that he may arise thurgh Penitence, if he have grace; but certeinly it is greet doute. (X, 91)

In describing repentance, the Parson's Tale returns to the acceptance of human failings we saw in the Miller's Tale, but with a difference. In the Parson's Tale doctrine works not only to portray the ideal but also to demonstrate how the ideal becomes attainable. The Parson's Tale returns to the broadest vision of human activity: striving for the ideal in the actual world.

Allen argues that the Parson's Tale must be viewed as ironic because it deals with the things of this world.[11] However, the Parson deals with this world for a good reason: it is here that man must act and try to win God's grace; thus the Parson's advice must necessarily deal with this world. The Parson's Tale is a manual of penance for those who need it.[12] Yes, man sins. Yes, man should obey doctrine. The Parson's Tale reiterates these statements, but does not limit man to condemnation: man may repent and be forgiven.

The emblem of the pilgrimage associated with the Parson's Tale is appropriate because it both reinforces the Parson's doctrine as correct and demonstrates the potential for man to be redeemed rather than damned. The Parson prays that his tale will be efficacious in sending his audience on a spiritual pilgrimage:

> "And Jhesu, for his grace, wit me sende
> To shewe yow the wey, in this viage,
> Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage
> That highte Jerusalem celestial."
> (X, 48-51)

The pilgrims are, of course, on pilgrimage, a physical pilgrimage, and thus it is appropriate to end the tales with some religious matter as they approach the goal of their journey. In a broader sense, all people are pilgrims while they live; they are partaking of the pilgrimage of life:

> Stondeth upon the weyes, and seeth and axeth of olde pathes (that is to seyn, of olde sentences) which is the goode wey,/ and walketh in that

> wey, and ye shal fynde refresshynge for youre soules, etc./ Manye been the weyes espirituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist, and to the regne of glorie./ Of whiche weyes, ther is a ful noble wey and a ful covenable, which may nat fayle to man ne to womman that thurgh synne hath mysgoon fro the righte wey of Jerusalem celestial;/ and this wey is cleped Penitence, of which man should gladly herknen and enquere with al his herte. . . . (X, 77-81)

As well as the literal and allegorical readings mentioned above, two other interpretations of the pilgrimage can be made. The third interpretation is tropological or moral, applying the pilgrimage in a larger moral sense; the pilgrimage represents the struggle to live as a good Christian. The fourth interpretation is anagogical, relating the pilgrimage to a larger concept in Christianity. The pilgrimage represents a soul's journey to the celestial Jerusalem. Common medieval practice for reading the Bible and other religious writings included this four-fold method of interpretation. When writing to Can Grande about The Divine Comedy, Dante detailed this method and specified that his masterpiece should be read in the same manner.[13] By allowing the pilgrimage to be interpreted with the same degree of complexity as the Bible, Chaucer reinforces the Parson's doctrine as ideal.

The Parson's Tale widens the vision of the Canterbury Tales not only by allowing for man's redemption but also by reintroducing the mirth found in the Miller's Tale. Sister Madeleva argues that humour is inherent in the concept of penance: people are blunderers, their sins often ridiculous, and thus God's saving of them may make them look ridiculous.[14] Nor is Sister Madeleva alone in finding humour in the Parson's Tale. Although he does not mention the Parson's Tale, D. Jeffrey expounds two sources of humour present in sin. There is the humour of identification: people often commit the same faults and laugh to see themselves look so stupid.[15] There is also the humour of reference. All things refer to God's creation, the perfection he placed on earth. Mankind is fallen, and now all things fall short of what God created. Jeffrey claims that people in the Middle Ages saw humour in this discrepancy.[16] The Parson's Tale depicts sin, but goes beyond what man can accomplish on his own. Only God can remedy sin, and in this granting of grace there is humour and joy.

Although the Parson's Tale returns to the broadest vision of man's activites and in doing so changes the pattern from linear to spiral, the Parson's Tale does further part of the linear pattern. The tale is limited by the manner in which it is told and by its subject matter. First of all, the tale is not poetry. Only one other of the existing Canterbury Tales is written in prose. Moreover, the Parson explicitly rejects poetry for his tale:

> "But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man,
> I kan nat geeste 'rum, ram, ruf,' by lettre,
> Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel bettre;
> And therfore, if yow list--I wol nat glose--
> I wol yow telle a myrie tale in prose
> To knytte up al this feeste, and make an ende."
> (X, 42-47)

The Parson's words imply a condemnation of secular poetry.[17] By calling rhyme "but litel bettre" than alliteration, the Parson is implying that neither is any good. And by rejecting poetry, the Parson is limiting his options as teller of the tale; he limits the potential forms of literature. As well as refusing to speak in poetry, the Parson also refuses to tell a story; he will not relate fiction. Once again, the Parson states his intentions clearly:

> "Thou getest fable noon ytoold for me;
> For Paul, that writeth unto Thymothee,
> Repreveth hem that weyven soothfastnesse,
> And tellen fables and swich wrecchednesse."
> (X, 31-34)

The Parson rejects the accoutrements of secular art that adorn even the religious tales; and it is Chaucer who makes him speak this rejection of art. The three tales we examined closely built a pattern in which doctrine came to be seen as restrictive. Yet, as the Parson's Tale demonstrates, doctrine should not be seen as restrictive but rather as liberating. Because the secular tales with their accoutrements of poetry and fiction were unable to convey the true message of doctrine, the Parson rejects these accourtrements in favour of clear explanation. Chaucer is leading his reader towards the Retractions.

The Retractions continue the pattern of narrowing. Although man can be redeemed from his sins, he must do more than merely refrain from sin; man must actively promote good. Chaucer realizes that his work may not be read as promoting good, and therefore he retracts his secular works:

> Wherfore I biseke yow mekely, for the mercy of God, that ye preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes;/ and namely of my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns:/ as is the book of Troilus; the book also of Fame; the book of the xxv. Ladies; the book of the Duchesse; the book of Seint Valentynes day of the Parlement of Briddes; the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen into synne;/ the book of the Leoun; and many another book, if they were in my remembrance, and many a song and many a leccherous lay; that Crist for his grete mercy foryeve me the synne. (X, 1084-87)

The Retractions are Chaucer's admission that secular art is limited. Secular art cannot perform that function which is most important: it cannot lead man to heaven. Rhyming and fictional, superficially secular art has nothing to do with doctrine. Only at a deeper level, invoked as the ideal in parody, does doctrine appear in secular art. Throughout the Canterbury Tales Chaucer has been using art, his art of poetry and story-telling, to convey the message of doctrine. But the pattern this artistic portrayal sets up is one in which doctrine leads to condemnation rather than salvation. Only in the Parson's Tale is this pattern turned. The Parson's Tale demonstrates the potential for redemption, for salvation, and the Parson's Tale rejects the accoutrements of poetry and fiction. Therefore the Parson's Tale does not have the limitations of Chaucer's earlier tales.[18]

Secular art serves a very limited function, and pursuing it limits the spiritual activity of both the author and the audiences. Realizing this, and realizing that he has not been following the best path all his life, Chaucer repents. The Retractions are Chaucer's act of contrition.[19] Yet Chaucer does not attempt to suppress or destroy those works he considers immoral. As we shall see, this action furthers the spiral pattern. He retracts his secular work and begs forgiveness for having written it, and with this act of contrition ends The Canterbury Tales. As the final piece of the Canterbury Tales, the Retractions are more than an end; they are a completion. Chaucer's penance and dismissal of secular art continue two themes from the Parson's Tale. Both the Parson's Tale and the Retractions restrict by dismissing secular art and prescribing man's actions. In doing so, they also demonstrate the doctrine of penance which liberates man and lifts him beyond the worldly sphere. In which direction is the pattern going?

This question cannot be decided without first deciding whether or not to read Chaucer's Retractions as sincere. Chaucer's tone in the Retractions would lead one to accept them: Chaucer is asking forgiveness for having written something of equivocal value.[20] Sister Madeleva makes the claim for Chaucer's sincerity on the basis of Christian morality: "The *Retraction* establishes two facts about him [Chaucer]: first, that he regarded the morality of a work its essential quality; secondly, he wished to let his own work live or die by that principle."[21] Chaucer's goal is heaven, and he will get there even if it means rejecting some of his best work, and retaining only that which promotes Christian doctrine:

> But of the translacion of Boece de Consolacione, and othere bookes of legendes of seintes, and omelies, and moralitee, and devocioun,/ that thanke I oure Lord Jhesu Crist and his blisful Mooder, and alle the seintes of hevene,/ bisekynge hem that they from hennes forth unto my lyves ende sende me grace to biwayle my giltes, and to studie to the salvacioun of my soule, and graunte me grace of verray penitence, confessioun and satisfaccioun to doon in this present lyf,/ thurgh the benigne grace of hym that is kyng of kynges and preest over alle preestes, that boghte us with the precious blood of his herte;/ so that I may been oon of hem at the day of doom that shulle be saved. *Qui cum patre et Spiritu Sancto vivit et regnat Deus per omnia secula. Amen.* (X, 1088-92)

The real judge and reader before whom Chaucer must lay his work is God. This is the critic Chaucer must ultimately please, and so he must judge his works as moral acts, for this is how God will view them.[22]

Modern critics, however, have their own points of view which may differ from God's. Many have been horrified at Chaucer's Retractions because he denies work they consider his best; they have tried to explain why the Retractions should not be considered sincere. One explanation is that retractions are a literary convention, and Chaucer was merely following this convention and is therefore insincere.[23] Some critics do not dispute the sincerity of the Retractions, but lessen their impact by claiming that they were a death-bed confession.[24] Another explanation which I cannot believe is that because of its limitations Chaucer's contemporaries did not value secular poetry, and thus Chaucer, by retracting his secular texts, is merely demonstrating that he is a product of his time.[25] From both their tone and their content, to me the Retractions sound wholly sincere. However, their sincerity adds to the ambiguity of Chaucer's actions.

Perhaps Chaucer anticipates at least some of the above responses. Certainly he anticipates some response, for he addresses his audience and tells them how to interpret his writing and to whom the credit should be assigned. Again, Chaucer is anticipating and directing reader response. Chaucer had a certain intent when he wrote, and like Augustine, believed that his intention was important for judging the moral value of his writing.[26] Chaucer tells his readers that all he has written has been written to promote doctrine, including the secular works. Through parody of religious emblems, even tales of adultery like the Miller's and the Merchant's can be read as promoting doctrine. But Chaucer cannot force his audience to read his works as he wishes them to, and thus he must retract his works. Chaucer calls upon his reader to exercise judgement, to employ what he has learned, and to praise or condemn his works according to moral criteria.[27] As D. Wurtele states it: "[Chaucer's] trouble is not that the offending portions of his work may be misinterpreted but that, read literally, they will cause scandal or lead his readers into temptation. For this offence he publicly voices regret."[28] In his Retractions Chaucer humbly acknowledges reader autonomy: he can lead us only so far. He cannot demand that we read his works in a certain way, and so he rejects those works he believes may be misunderstood.[29]

Chaucer is sincere in the Retractions. He asks forgiveness for all that could be misinterpreted, and as he created complex art, that is a lot. Yet Chaucer is not completely rejecting secular art; he provides a list of his works so that a reader may miss none.[30] Moreover, Chaucer makes a claim for his art, for all art, in the opening of his Retractions:

> For oure book seith, "Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine," and that is myn entente. (X, 1083)

By placing this quotation from Romans 15: 4 at the beginning of the Retractions, Chaucer

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mitigates both the Parson's complete condemnation of fiction and the possibility of reading the rest of the Retractions as an unqualified rejection.[31] Like the Parson's Tale, the Retractions follow the pattern in both directions. By performing his act of contrition, Chaucer follows the linear pattern and limits himself by rejecting secular art; Chaucer follows the spiral pattern and liberates himself from sin by opening the way for God's grace. The Retractions follow the spiral pattern in yet another way; by listing his works, Chaucer redirects us to the whole of The Canterbury Tales.

The Retractions then present two major problems: are they sincere? And if they are, does this mean Chaucer rejects secular art? If we pursue the linear pattern of The Canterbury Tales, the Retractions are not unexpected, are sincere, and do reject secular art. Because we would like to think Chaucer admired his art as much as we do, this conclusion is hard to swallow. If we pursue the spiral pattern of The Canterbury Tales, the Retractions still are not unexpected, but they may not be sincere, and they demonstrate an acceptance of art. In order to create a pattern, one must at some point during creation be aware of it. Therefore Chaucer must have understood the implications of his linear pattern, yet he did not stop writing. Despite the pattern's inherent rejection of art, Chaucer did not quit. Perhaps his refusal to quit should be taken as proof that Chaucer preferred the spiral pattern, but then we are left with the problem of the proof in favour of the linear pattern. The exact meaning of Chaucer's Retractions cannot easily be determined, for their author deliberately left them ambiguous. As with the tales, the reader must use his own judgement.

Can we then ultimately know whether Chaucer rejected his best pieces of art? Certainly the Retractions ring true: they reflect a sincere Christian belief, and it is conceivable that Chaucer honestly believed some of his writing might hinder his ascent to heaven. However, Chaucer is also a sincere artist. He could not be such a great author without believing in the worth of his writing, and he continued to write even believing that some of his work might condemn him. So we are left with the question of whether Chaucer really wanted his work rejected. The choice lies with us, his audience. Chaucer has chosen, although he does not finally tell us what, and he leaves us to make our own choice:

> Now preye I to hem alle that herkne this litel tretys or rede, that if ther be any thyng in it that liketh hem, that therof they thanken oure Lord Jhesu Crist, of whom procedeth al wit and al goodnesse./ And if ther be any thyng that displese hem, I preye hem also that they arrette it to the defaute of myn unkonnynge, and nat to my wyl, that wolde ful fayn have seyd bettre if I hadde had konnynge./ For oure book seith, "Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine," and that is myn entente. (X, 1081-83)

It seems that Chaucer has given us three choices: we can enjoy his secular art, we can reject it in favour of heaven, or we can learn from it, and compromise, as Chaucer seems to have done.

Notes

I. Introduction: Quilting the Pattern

[1] Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, p. 6.

[2] Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, p. 10.

[3] Edmund Reiss, "Chaucer's Parodies of Love," p. 27.

[4] Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, pp. 106-107.

[5] David Lyle Jeffrey, "Introduction: The Self and the Book," p. 14.

[6] David Lyle Jeffrey, "Introduction: The Self and the Book," pp. 13-14.

[7] My primary sources for doctrine are the following: St. Augustine's "The Good of Marriage," "To Polentius on Adulterous Marriages," "The Excellence of Widowhood," and "Holy Virginity"; St. Jerome's "The Virgin's Profession," "To Furia on the Duty of Remaining a Widow," "A Girl's Education," and "Dialogue against Jovinianus"; relevant parts of St. Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae; and Boethius' The Consolation of Philosophy. For modern commentary on medieval doctrine see: H. R. Hays' The Dangerous Sex; G. Rattray Taylor's Sex in History; Pierre J. Payer's Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550-1150; John T. Noonan's Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists; Marina Warner's Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary. Three major authors who discuss the doctrine of marriage and sex in the context of Chaucer's works are D. W. Robertson A Preface to Chaucer, Eugene Edward Slaughter Virtue According to Love--in Chaucer, and Henry Ansgar Kelly's Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer.

[8] T. P. Dunning, "Chaucer's Icarus-Complex," p. 94.

[9] St. Augustine, "Holy Virginity," p. 151.

[10] St. Augustine, "The Excellence of Widowhood," pp. 283, 303.

[11] St. Augustine, "The Excellence of Widowhood," p. 308.

[12] St. Augustine, "The Catholic and the Manichean Ways of Life," p. 60.

[13] St. Augustine, "The Good of Marriage."

[14] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 56, p. 143.

[15] Elizabeth M. Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law," p. 100.

[16] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 47, pp. 115, 117.

[17] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 38, p. 179, and vol. 43, p. 235.

[18] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 43, p. 213.

[19] The following authors all discuss how religion could be invoked in art through other means than citing of or allusion to doctrine: D. W. Robertson Jr. A Preface to Chaucer, Marina Warner Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary, and Bernard F. Huppé A Reading of the Canterbury Tales.

[20] G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England. The book documents the knowledge even an illiterate public would have had concerning religious allusion and imagery.

[21] Edmund Reiss, "Chaucer's Parodies of Love," p. 52.

[22] Pierre J. Payer, Sex and the Penitentials. On pages 52 and 53 Payer gives a statistical analysis of the percentage of total sins which are sexual: they range from 24% to 45%.

[23] E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer, p. 155.

[24] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, p. 31.

[25] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, p. 122.

[26] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, pp. 106-107.

[27] Andreas Capellanus, The Art ofCourtly Love, p. 167.

[28] See the following for the courtly love code: Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's The Romance of the Rose, Andreas Capellanus The Art of Courtly Love, The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, and Ovid The Heroides or Epistles of the Heroines. The Amours. Art of Love. Remedy of Love. and Minor Works. My sources for critical commentary on courtly love and courtly romances include the following: Alexander J. Denomy The Heresy of Courtly Love, Eugene Edward Slaughter Virtue According to Love--in Chaucer, C. S. Lewis The Allegory of Love, and Charles Muscatine Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning.

[29] E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer, p. 156.

[30] Henry Ansgar Kelly, Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer, p. 60.

[31] Margaret Schlauch, "Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale' and Courtly Love," p. 210.

[32] Andreas Capellanus, The Art of Courtly Love, p. 122.

[33] Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, p. 19.

[34] Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading, p. 37.

[35] Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading, p. 67.

[36] Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading, p. 28.

[37] This and all other quotations from Geoffrey Chaucer are taken from The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed., ed. F. N. Robinson (rpt. 1933; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957). All further quotations from The Canterbury Tales will be from the same source and will be cited parenthetically within the text by fragment and line number.

[38] Janette Richardson, Blameth Nat Me, pp. 116-17.

[39] Judith Ferster, Chaucer on Interpretation, p. 149.

II. The Miller

[1] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 386.

[2] Robert Kilburn Root, The Poetry of Chaucer, p. 177.

[3] Janette Richardson, Blameth Nat Me, p. 175.

[4] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, p. 102.

[5] R. E. Kaske, "The *Canticum Canticorum* in the Miller's Tale," pp. 489-91.

[6] James I. Wimsatt, "Chaucer and the Canticle of Canticles," p. 89.

[7] Jesse M. Gellrich, "The Parody of Medieval Music in the 'Miller's Tale,'" p. 182.

[8] Ruth M. Ames, God's Plenty, p. 190.

[9] Marina Warner, Alone of All her Sex, pp. 121-130.

[10] R. E. Kaske, "The *Canticum Canticorum* in the Miller's Tale," p. 497.

[11] The Chester Mystery Cycle, p. 102.

[12] Jesse M. Gellrich, "Nicholas' 'Kynges Noote' and 'Meldoye,'" p. 251.

[13] Beryl Rowland, "Chaucer's Blasphemous Churl," p. 47.

[14] Marina Warner, Alone of All her Sex, p. 148.

[15] Penny S. Gold, "The Marriage of Mary and Joseph in the Twelfth-Century Ideology of Marriage," p. 110.

[16] Kelsie B. Harder, "Chaucer's Use of the Mystery Plays in the Miller's Tale," p. 194.

[17] The Wakefield Mystery Plays, p. 86.

[18] Edmund Reiss, "Chaucer's Parodies of Love," p. 41.

[19] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 384.

[20] Chauncey Wood, "Artistic Intention and Chaucer's Uses of Scriptural Allusion," p. 42.

[21] Those passages from the Song of Songs which correspond to Absolon's song are 2: 14; 4: 11, 14; 5: 2, 8.

[22] James I. Wimsatt, "Chaucer and the Canticle of Canticles," p. 89.

[23] R. E. Kaske, "The *Canticum Canticorum* in the Miller's Tale," p. 496.

[24] James I. Wimsatt, "Chaucer and the Canticle of Canticles," p. 83.

[25] Jesse M. Gellrich, "The Parody of Medieval Music in the 'Miller's Tale,'" p. 179.

[26] Jesse M. Gellrich, "The Parody of Medieval Music in the 'Miller's Tale,'" p. 179.

[27] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, p. 103.

[28] Oxford English Dictionary.

[29] Oxford English Dictionary.

[30] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, p. 96.

[31] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, p. 96.

[32] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, pp. 97-98.

[33] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, pp. 97-98.

[34] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 384-85.

[35] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 384-85.

[36] Morton W. Bloomfield, "The Miller's Tale--An UnBoethian Interpretation," p. 210.

[37] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 114-17.

[38] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 117-18.

[39] Bruce R. Smith, "The Contest of Apollo and Marsyas," pp. 91-92.

[40] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 124.

[41] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 126.

[42] Bruce R. Smith, "The Contest of Apollo and Marsyas," p. 92.

[43] D. W. Robertson, Jr. A Preface to Chaucer, p. 130.

[44] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 131.

[45] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 133.

[46] John V. Fleming, "Gospel Ascetism," p. 183.

[47] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 122.

[48] Jesse M. Gellrich, "The Parody of Medieval Music in the 'Miller's Tale,'" p. 187.

[49] Jesse M. Gellrich, "The Parody of Medieval Music in the 'Miller's Tale,'" p. 188.

[50] Thomas W. Ross, Chaucer's Bawdy, p. 39.

III. The Wife of Bath

[1] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, pp. 136-37; James L. Boren, "Alysoun of Bath and the Vulgate 'Perfect Wife,'" p. 254.

[2] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 318.

[3] Charles E. Shain, "Pulpit Rhetoric in Three Canterbury Tales," p. 238.

[4] Charles E. Shain, "Pulpit Rhetoric in Three Canterbury Tales," p. 236.

[5] Charles E. Shain, "Pulpit Rhetoric in Three Canterbury Tales," p. 238.

[6] Charles E. Shain, "Pulpit Rhetoric in Three Canterbury Tales," p. 240.

[7] Charles E. Shain, "Pulpit Rhetoric in Three Canterbury Tales," p. 241.

[8] Charles E. Shain, "Pulpit Rhetoric in Three Canterbury Tales," pp. 243, 244.

[9] Charles E. Shain, "Pulpit Rhetoric in Three Canterbury Tales," p. 245.

[10] Lawrence Besserman, "'Glosynge is a Glorious Thyng,'" p. 70.

[11] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 317-31.

[12] St. Jerome Dialogue against Jovinianus, p. 375.

[13] St. Augustine, "The Excellence of Widowhood," p. 283.

[14] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 319.

[15] St. Augustine, "The Good of Marriage," p. 23.

[16] I Corinthians 7: 4

[17] Edmund Riess, "Chaucer's Parodies of Love," p. 28.

[18] Proverbs 31: 10-31.

[19] Edmund Riess, "Chaucer's Parodies of Love," p. 28.

[20] St. Augustine, "The Good of Marriage," pp. 29, 34-35.

[21] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 325.

[22] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 323-24.

[23] Russell A. Peck, "Biblical Interpretation," p. 160.

[24] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 320-21.

[25] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 326.

[26] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 13, p. 157.

[27] Bernard F. Huppé, A Reading of the Canterbury Tales, p. 116.

[28] Geoffrey Cooper, "'Sely John' in the 'Legende' of the Miller's Tale," p. 4.

[29] Rodney Delasanta, "*Quoniam* and the Wife of Bath," p. 204.

[30] Rodney Delasanta, "*Quoniam* and the Wife of Bath," p. 205.

[31] David Leon Higdon, "The Wife of Bath and Refreshment Sunday," pp. 199-200. The Bible passage referred to is John 6: 5-13.

[32] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 329.

[33] St. Augustine, "The Good of Marriage," pp. 27-28.

[34] I Corinthians 11: 3

[35] Anne Kernan, "The Archwife and the Eunuch," p. 12.

[36] Bernard F. Huppé, A Reading of the Canterbury Tales, p. 121.

[37] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, p. 144.

[38] Paul G. Ruggiers, The Art of the Canterbury Tales, p. 214; Ruth M. Ames, God's Plenty, p. 157.

[39] Helen Storm Corsa, Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality, pp. 147-48.

[40] Anne Kernan, "The Archwife and the Eunuch," p. 9.

[41] Edmund Reiss, "Chaucer's Parodies of Love," p. 52.

[42] I Corinthians 7: 3: "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband."

[43] Paul G. Ruggiers, The Art of the Canterbury Tales, p. 214.

[44] Anne Kernan, "The Archwife and the Eunuch," p. 24.

[45] Robert Kilburn Root, The Poetry of Chaucer, pp. 236-38.

[46] Dolores Palomo, "The Fate of the Wife of Bath's 'Bad Husbands,'" p. 308.

[47] T. L. Burton, "The Wife of Bath's Fourth and Fifth Husbands and her Ideal Sixth," p. 39.

[48] T. L. Burton, "The Wife of Bath's Fourth and Fifth Husbands and her Ideal Sixth," p. 38.

[49] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 134.

[50] Thomas W. Ross, Chaucer's Bawdy, pp. 236-37.

[51] Kenneth J. Oberembt, "Chaucer's Anti-Misogynist Wife of Bath," p. 292.

[52] Gloria Cigman, "Introduction," p. 2.

IV. The Merchant

[1] Paul A. Olson, "Chaucer's Merchant and January's 'Hevene in Erthe Heere,'" p. 205.

[2] Donald R. Benson, "The Marriage 'Encomium' in the Merchant's Tale;" Benson discusses the marriage encomium and whether to attribute it to January or to the Merchant.

[3] Rebecca (Genesis 27) deceives her husband into blessing the child she favours; Judith (Apocrypha, Book of Judith 8-13) uses feminine guile to gain access to Holofernes and slay him; Abigail (I Samuel 25) stays David's wrath by giving away her husband's goods and marries David on her husband's death; Esther (Esther 1-7) through subtlety and guile manouveurs against Haman's proposals to which her husband agreed.

[4] Emerson Brown Jr., "Biblical Women in the Merchant's Tale," p. 408.

[5] J. D. Burnley, "The Morality of The Merchant's Tale," p. 22.

[6] J. D. Burnley, "The Morality of The Merchant's Tale," p. 20.

[7] Ruth M. Ames, God's Plenty, p. 161.

[8] J. D. Burnley, "The Morality of The Merchant's Tale," p. 20.

[9] St. Augustine, Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects, p. 17.

[10] Margaret Schlauch, "Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale' and Courtly Love," p. 211.

[11] Margaret Schlauch, "Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale' and Courtly Love," pp. 206-7.

[12] Margaret Schlauch, "Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale' and Courtly Love," p. 210.

[13] C. Hugh Holman, "Courtly Love in the Merchant's and Franklin's Tales," p. 247.

[14] C. Hugh Holman, "Courtly Love in the Merchant's and Franklin's Tales," p. 246.

[15] E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer, pp. 30-45. These pages contain Donaldson's entire discussion of tone in the Merchant's Tale.

[16] Analogous phrases to those occurring in lines 2138 to 2148 can be found in the Song of Songs 2: 10-13; 4: 7, 12; 7: 7-8.

[17] Janette Richardson, Blameth Nat Me, p. 118.

[18] E. Talbot Donaldson, Speaking of Chaucer, pp. 43-44.

[19] James I. Wimsatt, " Chaucer and the Canticle of Canticles," pp. 85-86.

[20] Ruth M. Ames, God's Plenty, p. 189.

[21] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 386-87.

[22] Cassell's Latin Dictionary.

[23] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, p. 257.

[24] D. W. Robertson Jr., A Preface to Chaucer, pp. 70-71.

[25] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 44, pp. 159-63.

[26] Kenneth A. Bleeth, "The Image of Paradise in the Merchant's Tale," p. 53.

[27] Thomas W. Ross, Chaucer's Bawdy, p. 173.

[28] James I. Wimsatt, "Chaucer and the Canticle of Canticles," p. 87.

[29] John Bugge, "Damyan's Wanton *Clyket* and an Ironic New *Twiste* to the Merchant's Tale," pp. 55, 57.

[30] James I. Wimsatt, "Chaucer and the Canticle of Canticles," p. 89.

[31] Russell A. Peck, "Biblical Interpretation," p. 165.

[32] Russell A. Peck, "Biblical Interpretation," p. 165.

[33] St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, vol. 44, p. 163.

[34] Dante, Purgatory, vol. 1 of The Divine Comedy:

> . . . Then righteous zeal
> made me curse the presumptuousness of Eve:

> to think that, while all earth and Heaven obeyed
> His will, a single woman, newly made,
> would dare strip off the veil imposed by Him!
>
> Had she remained submissive to His will,
> I could on these ineffable delights
> have feasted sooner and for much more time.
> (Canto 29, 23-30, p. 310)

[35] Kenneth A. Bleeth, "The Image of Paradise in the Merchant's Tale," p. 59.

[36] J. D. Burnley, "The Morality of The Merchant's Tale," p. 24.

[37] J. D. Burnley, "The Morality of The Merchant's Tale," p. 24.

[38] Kenneth A. Bleeth, "The Image of Paradise in the Merchant's Tale," p. 59.

[39] Kenneth A. Bleeth, "The Image of Paradise in the Merchant's Tale," p. 56.

[40] Peter G. Beidler, "Chaucer's Merchant and the Tale of January," p. 20.

[41] R. E. Kaske, "Chaucer's Marriage Group," p. 56.

[42] Peter G. Beidler, "Chaucer's Merchant and the Tale of January," p. 19.

[43] Peter G. Beidler, "Chaucer's Merchant and the Tale of January," p. 18.

V. Conclusion: Spiralling Back

[1] Robert A. Pratt, "The Order of the Canterbury Tales."

[2] Ruth M. Ames, God's Plenty, p. 33.

[3] John 10: 7-18.

[4] Malcolm Andrew, "January's Knife," p. 276.

[5] T. P. Dunning, "Chaucer's Icarus-Complex," p. 105.

[6] Edmund Reiss, "Chaucer's Parodies of Love," p. 31.

[7] Lee W. Patterson, "The Parson's Tale and the Quitting of the Canterbury Tales," pp. 361, 369.

[8] John Leyerle, "Thematic Interlace in The Canterbury Tales," p. 112.

[9] Judson Boyce Allen, "The Old Way and the Parson's Way," p. 270.

[10] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, p. 132.

[11] Judson Boyce Allen, "The Old Way and the Parson's Way," p. 258.

[12] Lee W. Patterson, "The Parson's Tale and the Quitting of the Canterbury Tales," p. 339.

[13] Dante, "Excerpt from Letter to Can Grande della Scala," The Divine Comedy, vol. 1, p. 42.

[14] Sister M. Madeleva, A Lost Language and Other Essays on Chaucer, pp. 76-77.

[15] David Lyle Jeffrey, "Introduction: The Self and the Book," pp. 13-14.

[16] David Lyle Jeffrey, "Introduction: The Self and the Book," p. 14.

[17] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, p. 132.

[18] Sister M. Madeleva, A Lost Language and Other Essays on Chaucer, p. 110.

[19] P. M. Kean, Chaucer and the Making of English Poetry, vol. 2, pp. 186-87.

[20] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, pp. 238, 239.

[21] Sister M. Madeleva, A Lost Language and Other Essays on Chaucer, p. 114.

[22] Sister M. Madeleva, A Lost Language and Other Essays on Chaucer, p. 108.

[23] Olive Sayce, "Chaucer's 'Retractions.'" The whole article documents how the Retractions follow a literary tradition; Sayce believes that they are no more than an extension of that tradition.

[24] John Gardner, The Life and Times of Chaucer, p. 313.

[25] Alfred David, The Strumpet Muse, pp. 238-39.

[26] Rosemarie Potz McGerr, "Retraction and Memory," p. 112.

[27] Rosemaire Potz McGerr, "Retraction and Memory," pp. 101-2.

[28] Douglas Wurtele, "The Penitence of Geoffrey Chaucer," p. 336.

[29] Judith Ferster, Chaucer on Interpretation, p. 156.

[30] Olive Sayce, "Chaucer's 'Retractions,'" p. 238.

[31] Rosemarie Potz McGerr, "Retraction and Memory," p. 101.

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